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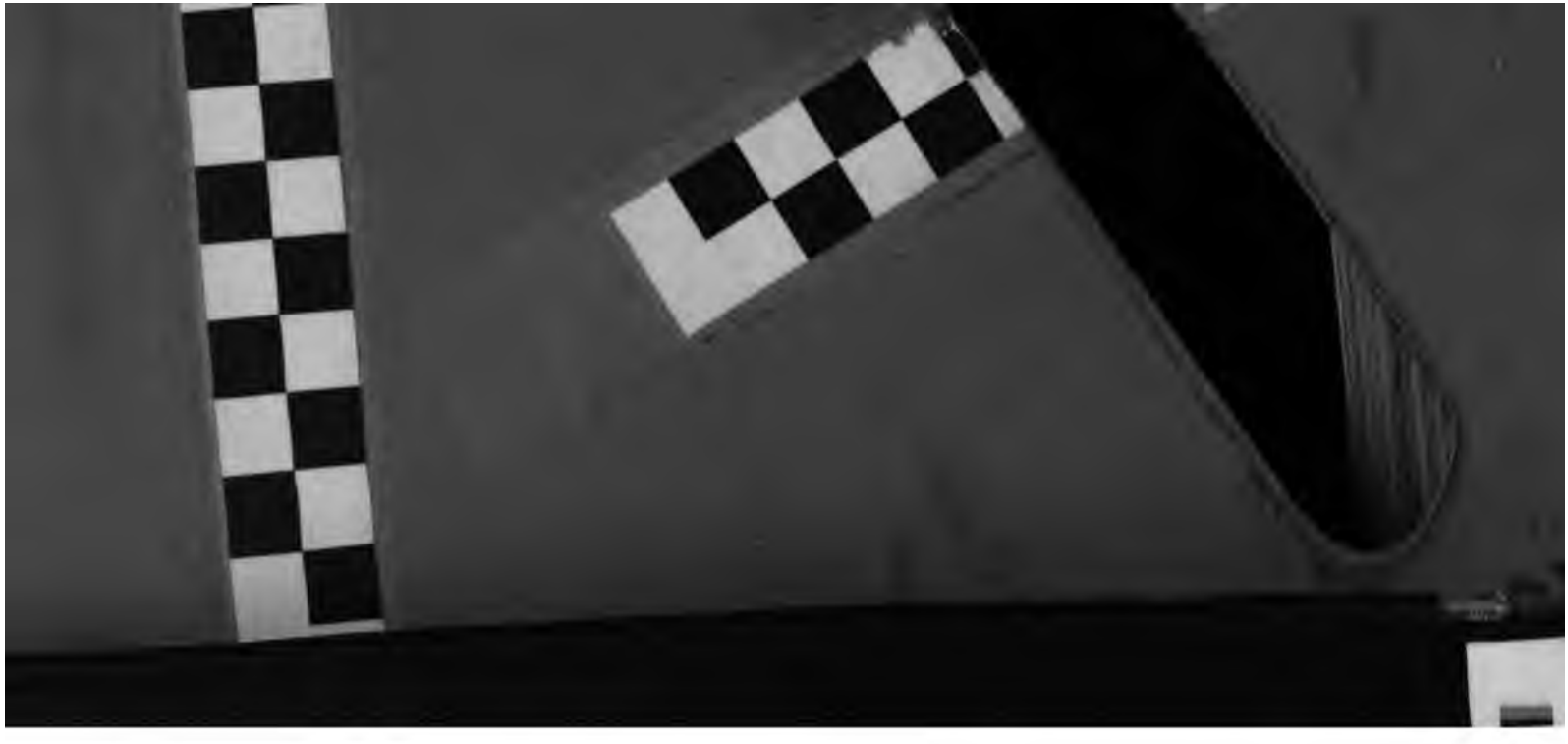

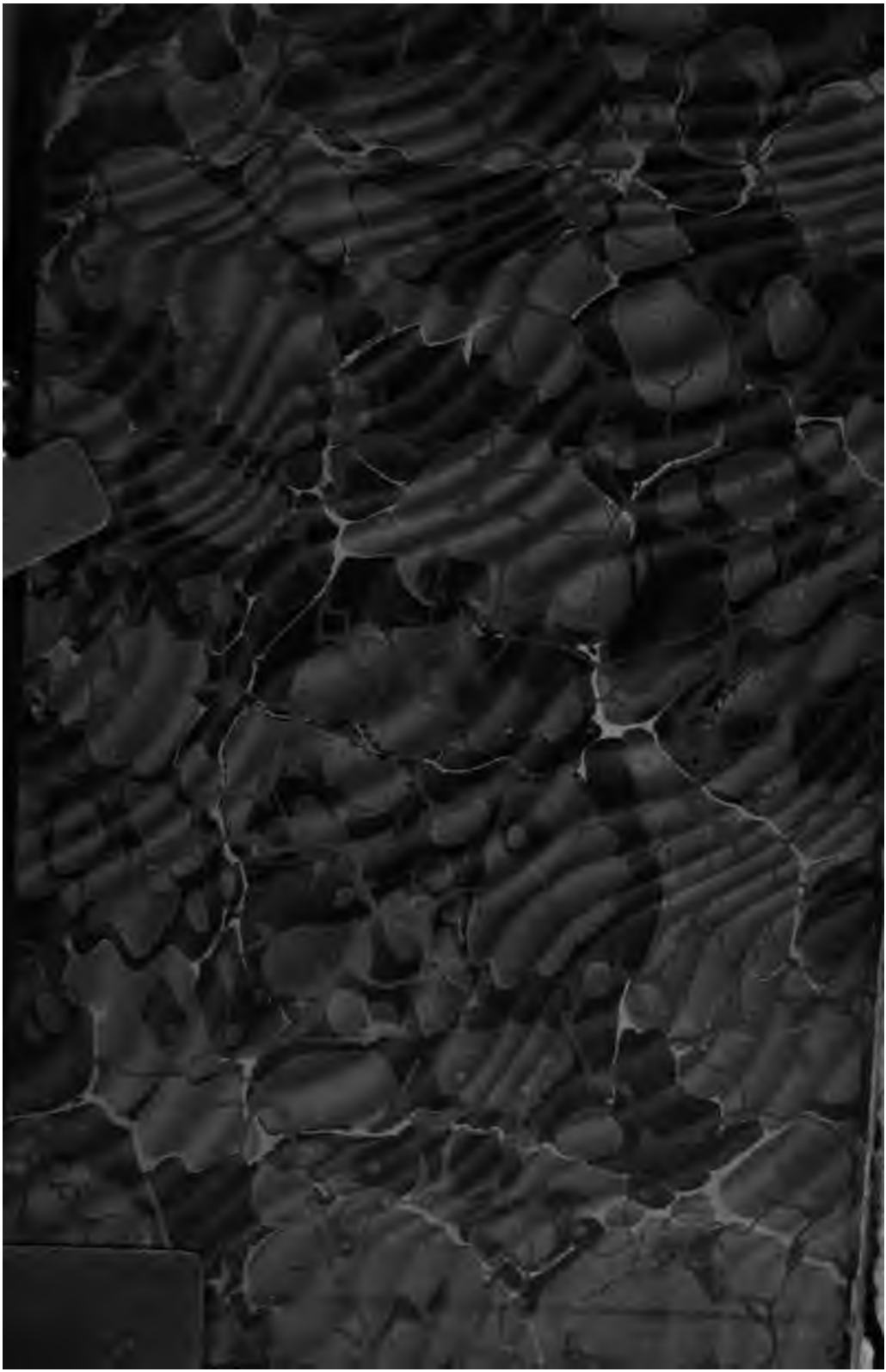

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I opened my eyes and saw my sister's . . . children.

ORIGINAL ETCHING BY LOUIS MEYNELL.

The Works of

CHARLES PAUL DE KOCK

With a General Introduction by

JULES CLARETIE

MY NEIGHBOR RAYMOND

Translated into English by

EDITH MARY NORRIS

VOLUME II

THE FREDERICK J. QUINBY COMPANY

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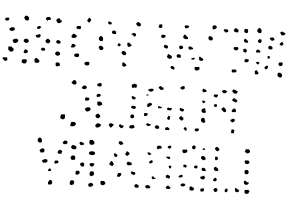

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CHAPTER I

A Country Excursion

The day on which I was to accompany my neighbor Raymond on an excursion to Madame de Marsan's country house arrived. I had taken care to inform Caroline that she need not expect to see me on that evening; she appeared not a little put out and vexed thereat, although we had had rather a warm discussion the evening before relative to a certain cashmere shawl for which she had a great desire, and which I emphatically declined to give her. I had, however, by dint of argumentative reasoning, not only made her understand that she would not get the article in question, but I made her comprehend also that she had no need of an Indian shawl in order to be charming, and that she pleased me better when her dress was elegantly simple; so we had made up after our little quarrel and we had parted later on the best friends in the world.

Seven o'clock struck, I had finished dressing and the portress had already been to inform me that the cabriolet had arrived and was awaiting us in the courtyard. Whenever Raymond was ready to do so we could start, but what was he still

doing in his rooms? I would go in search of him, for it was time to start.

I found my neighbor just getting into a pair of breeches.

"What, M. Raymond, is that as far as you've got?"

"Oh, I'll be ready in a minute, I assure you."

"And I am willing to wager you won't be ready in half an hour."

"Pshaw, you'll see how quick I can be. But while you are waiting, just look over my little water-colors, my sketches, you'll find some very pretty things there. If I had more time I should devote myself to painting in oils and I should exhibit at the Salon; but I am never free from the obligations of society."

"I advise you to keep to water-colors, yours are really remarkable."

"Are they not?—they are comical, original, after the style of Callot. Do you see that 'Suzanne at the Bath' over there?"

"I thought it was the 'Temptations of Saint Anthony.'"

"Oh, that's because it is not finished. And my 'Petit-Poncet,' what do you think of that, hey?"

"I took it for 'Bluebeard.'"

"That's because he has his seven-leagued boots on."

"Come, neighbor, come, have you got no further than your breeches yet?"

"A part of the toilet which requires the most scrupulous nicety; one has to be so careful that there are no wrinkles."

"Why, nobody wears anything but trousers now, even at balls."

"When one has such a leg as mine and a calf fit for a sculptor's model, one is not ashamed to wear them even though no one else does. Would you like to read my last verses on the death of a favorite dog of the Marquise Desormeaux?"

"Thanks, much obliged."

"They had an immense success. All the ladies said jokingly they would get me to write their husbands' epitaphs. The opening lines are striking,—

O dog of nature, most faithful of animals."

I had heard tell of a man of nature, but I confess this was the first time I had known of the epithet being applied to a brute beast, and I said,—

"Do you imagine then, my dear Raymond, that there are perverted animals?"

"And why not?—why, don't you see them every day, those poor beasts whom they force to dance, to bow, to ride in a carriage, to march in a circle to the sound of the flageolet? These dogs have been educated. The marquise's spaniel was very different to these animals. He followed his own impulses, he bit everyone who approached his mistress and jumped on the table when she was dining to help himself from the plates and dishes.

This was quite natural and I maintain that 'dog of nature' is an extremely happy idea."

"Come, Raymond, drop your animal and make an end of dressing; if you are as slow about the rest of it as you have been up to now, we shan't get there until midnight."

"I'll be at your service in a moment or so. I've got my shoes and stockings on — and my breeches — but it seems to me there's a crease on the left thigh."

"When you get your coat on, no one will see it."

"Yes, but in walking or in dancing the coat will open."

"What does a crease more or less matter? — do you think every one's going to look at you?"

"I tell you a crease mars the contour — and women notice everything."

"They who notice such trifles as that will find sufficient occupation in a large gathering."

"There! that is better, now for my cravat."

"That'll take a deuce of a time, I suppose."

"Oh, no, I've made a study of that part of my attire — my cravat almost ties itself — hello! how's this — should I tie it with the ends up or down?"

"Put your ends where you like, but try to decide what you are going to do."

"Well, I shall place them horizontally — there, what do you think of that bow?"

"It's ravishing — you look superb."

"Superb is rather strong, but I think I look well enough; now I've only to put three pins in it."

"By Jove, we shan't get started before eight!"

"Devil take it! this is a great nuisance, I should have thought about this beforehand."

"What's the matter now, have you overlooked something?"

"I don't know whether to put this turquoise below or above my emerald,"

"Why, hang it, Raymond! I've no patience with you, I shall start without you."

"I'm ready, I'm ready, neighbor,; faith, let it chance as it may, I've put the turquoise above."

"That's very fortunate."

"Now, my coat, my hat, my gloves; you see, here I am all ready."

"That is really astonishing. Well, let's be off."

"Yes, let's be off; just allow me one moment. I've forgotten a scented handkerchief."

We left the room at length, but even then, as Raymond locked his door he perceived that he had not put his ring on his little finger and must go in again to get the forgotten article; then, in going down, when we came to the second landing he found that his opera was not in his pocket and went up to get it, and, finally, when we reached the courtyard he remembered that he had not taken his favorite songs, and as he had been asked to sing he had to go back for them. I assured

myself with some emphasis that I would not be caught going anywhere with M. Raymond again. At length, at a quarter-past eight, we got into the cabriolet, and then he discovered that he had not his lorgnon; but there I drew the line and declined to allow him to get out of the carriage, I whipped up the horse and we were off. It was dark, and Raymond was therefore unable to read his opera as he had intended, but to indemnify himself for this he proposed that he should relate the plot to me. For a whole hour did he talk to me of a Spanish princess and her lover, an Arabian prince, while I thought of Madame de Marsan, whom I was not sorry to have an opportunity of seeing again; indeed, I felt rather astonished that I had so long neglected her.

It was fully half-past nine when we arrived at Saint-Denis, and I mentally swore at Raymond, whose ridiculous airs and graces and dilatoriness would make us reach Madame de Marsan's much too late.

"Have we much farther to go?" said I to my neighbor, as we left Saint-Denis behind us.

"Why, no; a short three-quarters of a league. I was saying to you that my princess, whom they'd just saved from the burning palace, ought to faint at the close of the second act."

"You know the way, don't you?"

"Yes, yes; go on, I will direct you. In the third act, when the curtain rises, the princess is

discovered in her lover's camp, lying on a cannon."

"You have been to the country house before?"

"Once, but that is enough, my memory is so exact. The soldiers are sleeping on their pikes, or their guns, because I'm not very sure that they had pikes under King Ferdinand; but that's of no consequence. The prince, who had no desire to sleep —"

"It seems to me that they told me to take the road to the left."

"Not at all, follow right on. The prince, as I was saying, is on his knees before the princess, who is still fainting, and he is singing a superb adagio in D-minor to bring her to. I composed the music of that also. Can't you picture the scene to yourself?"

"I picture to myself the fact that if you don't leave your prince and princess we shall presently bring up at Montmorency, and that cannot certainly get us to our destination; but I am too good-natured to listen thus to your tales, since you pretend to know the way take the reins and drive."

"Oh, I ask nothing better; I wager we aren't two hundred steps from Madame de Marsan's."

"I don't see any light, however."

"It's a very dark night. This devil of a horse has a very hard mouth."

"You pull him too tight."

"Oh, I see something; coachman, what place is this?"

"It's Montmorency, monsieur," shouted our groom.

"There now, you see Raymond; I must say you are a clever fellow!"

"Don't be angry, my dear Dorsan; we'll take this road to the left, I remember now, that leads straight to Madame de Marsan's."

"I think the best thing for us to do is to go back to Paris — it looks as if we were going to have a storm."

"What does that matter? The fête will take place in the house."

"The fête, why, deuce take it, we shan't get there before eleven."

"We'll be there by ten — I am going to give this confounded beast a taste of the whip."

"Do as you please, I'm beginning to get resigned; I've done all that I could."

"They are anxiously expecting us, I am sure. Get up, rascal, get up!"

"If you say they've forgotten our very existence you'll be nearer the mark."

"Oh, people of our stamp are not so easily forgotten. Get up, you jade."

"Take care, you're whipping him too much — you'll make him run away."

"By Jove, I believe you're right, he's getting unmanageable."

"Hold him in, pull on the reins."

"I can't hold him in — I'm pulling as hard as I can. Good God! he's going across country."

"Come, don't be frightened — he'll stop. Get down, my man, and try to stop him."

Our groom had jumped to the ground as I spoke, but he did not follow us and I feared he was hurt. The horse galloped madly across the fields, the roads, and the ploughed land. I had taken the reins from my companion, who was in a state of terror that rendered him unfit for anything; he trembled in every limb as he shouted at the top of his voice for help. To crown our misfortune, it began to storm violently, the clouds yawned and the rain fell in torrents, and the wind blew in our faces. Our horse did not pause in his mad career, and I was beginning to fear some serious accident; we were on a very steep slope and I expected every moment that the carriage would be upset when, fortunately, some vines barred our mettlesome steed's passage and brought him to a dead stop; but, in trying to disengage himself from some hop poles in which he was caught, he leaped so violently that he overturned us on the slope and fell himself.

"I'm done for," shrieked Raymond, as he fell. Before informing myself whether this asseveration was correct, I tried to release myself from my temporary prison, for the vine poles obstructed the entrance to our carriage. At last I managed to

draw myself clear of it, and found that I had sustained no injury, not even a bruise; I considered myself very fortunate in having got off with nothing more serious than a fright. Since it was written that I should not go to Madame de Marsan's I made up my mind to bear as philosophically as possible the misadventures which M. Raymond seemed destined to bring upon me, so I hastened to inquire into my neighbor's condition, for he was uttering truly fearsome groans; was he really injured, I wondered. If it were so, that would render our position even more uncomfortable. I drew near to Raymond, who, as we went over, had partly fallen from the cabriolet, and was now lying with his face on the ground. I shook him by the arm, but I had some little trouble in getting him to raise his head; the rain had already formed many puddles and the ploughed soil was stuck all over Raymond's face, who moaned in a half-extinct voice that his sight was leaving him.

"That's nothing; turn your face towards the sky, and I'll answer for it that the rain will soon wash your face and get the mud out of your eyes."

"You are right, my dear fellow, it's clearing it away already. I can see almost as well as ever. Ah, I can breathe freely now."

"Well, how is it? are you really hurt?"

"Wait a bit, I'll feel myself. I'm bruised all over, but I don't think I've sustained any serious injury."

"That's extremely fortunate."

"My dear fellow, what a terrible adventure!"

"And whose fault was it?"

"Not so quick. I flogged the horse because you were in a hurry to reach our destination."

"That's right; try to blame me for your stupidity, put it all on my back."

"We're in a pretty condition, and the rain's coming down in torrents. It seems as though everything was conspiring against us — yes, even up to my hat, which burst when I fell."

"Oh, confound it! what does it matter about your hat?"

"I tell you it matters a great deal about my head, left unprotected in this storm. I am soaked, dirty, aching, bruised. What a cold I shall have, and my clothes — it was worth while dressing for this. Just look at my stockings! and my necktie is hanging on the vine poles. Good heavens! a trifle more would finish me."

"Come, hang it, Raymond, pull yourself together, you are worse than a child. We must get out of this."

"Where's our groom?"

"I'm afraid the poor devil was hurt when he jumped out, and I'll be hanged if I know where to look for him."

"If we could but manage to raise the carriage."

"And what about the wheel that came off when we upset?"

"The devil himself must have had a hand in it."

"I am afraid the horse also has hurt himself on these poles."

"This pleasure party is likely to cost us dear, neighbor. How fortunate are you in being able to take it so tranquilly — as for me I am prostrate and furious at the same time."

"Follow me. We must try to discover a house, — a shelter, in fact; but be careful to notice particularly the way we take. Are you coming?"

"Wait a bit, I must knot my handkerchief so as to form some protection for my head."

We got out of the vines at last, but even then I had to take Raymond's hand to get him along, for he feared to fall at every step. We walked along thus for ten minutes, plunging at every moment into holes filled with water, which the darkness prevented us from seeing. I swore, and Raymond plaintively bemoaned himself, declaring he fully expected to have inflammation of the lungs. At last we perceived a little cottage, and the light which shone through the panes informed us that the occupants had not gone to bed, for peasants do not usually burn a light when they are sleeping.

"We are saved," shouted Raymond, whose legs were renewed at the hope of rescue, and he started to run towards the cottage; but I stopped him, fearing lest he should announce himself in such

a manner as to cause them to refuse to open to us, and insisted on knocking at the door myself.

Country people are seldom suspicious, these were very poor and therefore not afraid of robbers. They opened the door to us, and I saw in a big room a peasant surrounded by half-a-dozen children. I explained our adventure, while Raymond, who was already in the room, looked into a large bowl containing the peasants' supper, and came back to me to whisper with a grimace that we should not find very good accommodations in that house.

"What can I do for you, messieurs," the peasant asked us, watching Raymond as he ferreted with his eyes in every corner of the room.

"Are we far from Montmorency?"

"No, a little over a quarter of a league."

"We do not know the way, will you kindly allow your oldest boy to lead us?—we will pay him for his services."

So saying I offered the peasant a crown, which made him immediately desirous of being useful.

"That is very easy," said he; "Julien, you will go with these gentlemen. If you are tired," he continued, "I can let you have some donkeys."

"Which I gladly accept, for our first duty is to go and look for our groom, who must be somewhere hereabouts; and then we shall have to get the horse up, for he must not pass the night in the field."

"Come, Julien, go and bring our donkeys from the stable; — they are not saddled, I warn you."

"No matter, they'll be useful to us, no doubt."

The donkeys were brought; I paid for the hire of them on the spot, and I took a third for our groom whom I hoped to find. Raymond was extremely averse to mounting his beast; he wanted a saddle, stirrups, cushions; he pretended he could ride a horse like Franconi, and he was unable to keep his seat on an ass. Tired of all these croakings I went on with the little peasant, who had mounted the third donkey, in search of the groom. Raymond, seeing that I paid no attention to him, decided to follow me, holding by one hand to the tail and by the other to the mane of his donkey. He pushed the poor beast behind me, and we were again in the fields.

I let my ass trot as he would. I shouted loudly to the groom, and my companions also shouted at the top of their lungs; at last some one answered us. We followed the sound of the voice and found our youth lying under a tree; the poor devil had a sprained foot and could not walk. I made him mount the ass which the little peasant had ridden. It was now only a question of getting our horse up, which was still lying near the cabriolet. The rain had quite quenched the poor brute's spirits and he allowed us to get him on his feet. Our guide assured himself that the animal was not injured, mounted him, placed himself at our head,

and the cavalcade started off in the direction of Montmorency.

All these details had taken time, it was after half past eleven when we left our carriage, which I put in charge of the little peasant, who promised me to go at break of day in search of a wheelwright to repair it.

Had it not been for Raymond we should have got along finely, but he forced us to stop at every step; his donkey would not go or turned stubborn and led him into another road, and my neighbor uttered terrible shouts when we did not wait for him. Fortunately, the rain had ceased and the sky had cleared a little, which permitted us to see our way before us. About midnight we could distinguish the walls of the first houses of Montmorency. Raymond gave vent to a joyful shout, and his ass, frightened by the sudden noise, kicked up his hind legs and tumbled his rider in a muddy lane, where the latter left his shoes. As we were in front, Raymond was obliged to pick himself up as best he could, and fear of being parted from us lent him strength; but his steed did not tarry for him, and he finished the journey by running after his donkey, which he did not manage to catch till we were on the point of alighting. All the inn people had gone to bed, but we knocked until they answered us. They were astonished at travellers arriving so late, and were still more surprised when they observed our condition—above all that

of Raymond, whose last fall had covered him with mud from his head to his heels. However, they opened the door to us and, as I had foreseen, gave us but a cold welcome; but I soon got them to listen to me, and the host, who saw that he had to do with people of condition, apologized and conducted us to some apartments. His people lodged our groom, led the horse to the stable, and the peasant returned home with his donkeys.

I ordered them to make a good fire to dry our clothing, and begged the host to serve us with anything he had ready to eat, for our mishaps had not deprived us of appetite. They served us with a fowl, a ham, a salad, and fruits. While I took my seat at the table, Raymond went into his room, where he had also had a fire lighted, and he begged the girl who waited on us to rub his back and sides in order to ward off an illness. The servant was a buxom lass of twenty, who looked as if she might be afraid of no man. However, Raymond's order seemed somewhat singular to her; she looked at me, smiling sheepishly, and hesitated.

"Come," said I, "don't be afraid; it's a simple enough service, for monsieur is concerned only about his health. I'll answer for his discretion."

While my companion was being rubbed, I did honor to the supper and dried myself thoroughly before the fire. The door of my neighbor's room was not closed and I heard him urging the maid to rub harder, while complimenting her on her

skill. The girl must have been tired by this time, but it seemed to me that Raymond had taken a liking to her and that the fire and the friction had restored his usual spirits, for a very lively flirtation was taking place; I heard the girl say that she should be angry if he tried to kiss her again — and I had vouched for his good behavior! — It is impossible to rely on anyone.

There was a noise in the next room, as though people were scuffling, and the fat girl dashed into my room, closely pursued by the ubiquitous Raymond in shirt and drawers and wearing the innkeeper's old slippers.

"Are you not going to be quiet this evening, M. Raymond? Am I to have no peace with you?" said I tartly.

"My dear fellow, look at those eyes — if she would only give me a kiss."

"Yes, but I don't choose to, monsieur."

"Come, Raymond, let the young girl get to bed; it is late, and this is no time to wake the whole inn. I have no desire to get into any further scrapes for all the beautiful eyes in the world. Leave us, my girl, we need nothing more."

"Wait a bit, my beauty, where is your room?"

"What business of yours is that?"

"Still, tell me, my jewel, that won't hurt you."

"Well, then, I am up one flight — at the end of the passage."

"Good enough! I understand."

The maid left us, and Raymond came to the table.

"I hope," said I to him, "that you are not going to run after that girl, who's only making game of you."

"No! no! I was joking, that was all. She's a buxom lass, though."

"And she thinks you a fine figure of a man, no doubt; she was rubbing you long enough."

"Certainly, the jade knows a good-looking man when she sees him."

"She didn't appear favorably disposed toward you, however."

"Bah, she intimated to me where I could find her."

"Don't trust yourself to her tender mercies."

"Oh, I've no desire to go in search of her; courting a kitchenmaid is hardly in my line, though, to be sure, nothing hinders me but my own will."

"I don't think so."

"Will you bet on that?"

"No, because you'd be up to some other little caper which would make my night as agreeable as my evening has been, and I've had quite enough of it for today. Good-night, M. Raymond; I'm going to bed, and I advise you to do as much."

"Yes, neighbor, yes; I shall do the same. I hope you'll sleep as well as will yours truly."

Raymond took his candle, looking rather put out as he did so, and went into his room and shut

the door. I laughed to myself at the conceit and silly affectation of this unique specimen of mankind, and got into bed, where I was not long in falling asleep; a noise, the origin of which I could not determine, presently awoke me. I listened. I called Raymond to learn if he felt indisposed, but he did not answer me, and hearing no further sound I went to sleep again. I did not awaken until eight o'clock. The sun was shining full into my room and assured me that the weather was fine. As I was at Montmorency, though against my will, I might as well enjoy some of the delightful walks which the neighborhood afforded and taste some of the pleasures of the country before returning to Paris. Besides, our carriage would not be mended yet, we should have to wait for that.

While dressing, I called Raymond, and asked him if he wanted to come for a little walk before breakfast. He did not answer, and I supposed he was still sleeping. But the door of his room was half open, and it occurred to me that he had shut it the night before. So I went towards it and called out to him,—

"Come, you lazy fellow! get up; it is late—come, wake up!"

Still no answer; I looked at the bed, he was not there; so he had gone out without awakening me and was evidently an earlier riser than myself. I was about to leave the room, when I saw the coat and waistcoat and breeches which Raymond

had spread on the chairs to dry. What! had he gone out, not only without his coat, but without his breeches also — how very singular. Then I remembered my neighbor's plans, his flirtation with the maid, and the wager he had wanted to make with me at supper. I was no longer in doubt. I could account for M. Raymond's absence; wishing to prove to me how irresistible everyone found him, he had gone in search of the Phyllis who had acted as his valet the night before. But the inn servants didn't lie abed till eight o'clock; they must have been up for a long time. Why had not Raymond returned to his room?—did he want everybody in the inn to know what he had been up to? I did not see the necessity for that. However, I must assure myself of the facts. I called, I rang, and the servant came — the one who had waited on us the evening before. She appeared just the same as usual — a smile on her lips, and her big eyes wide open, her speech slow and emphatic. The girl did not appear at all bashful or timid, and I concluded that she was accustomed to similar adventures. I looked at her, laughing as I did so.

"You called me, monsieur?"

"Yes, my girl."

"What did you please to want, monsieur?"

"How is our groom?"

"Oh, he's getting along finely, monsieur; he's had his foot bandaged."

"And what about the cabriolet?"

"There's not much the matter with that, it'll take but a matter of two hours to repair it. But the owner of the vines where you were upset has followed the wheelwright; he demands indemnification, he says you've destroyed more than a dozen shoots of his vines."

"Come, does he want us to pay him because we didn't kill ourselves on his hop poles? Let them give him a hundred sous. But, come now, my buxom damsel, what have you done with my companion?"

"With your companion?"

"Yes, the gentleman who came with me."

"Why, the one who lost his shoes and whom I was obliged to rub for so long?"

"Precisely."

"Mercy! I haven't done anything with him, and I didn't wish to have anything to do with him; although he was running after me like a thirsty dog after water. He's a great flirt, I can tell you that."

"My dear, it is useless for you to pretend with me; he left his room in search of you. It's not for me to say there's any wrong in that, but where the devil is he now?"

"What are you talking about? — he come to my room?— that's a good one! but it isn't true — do you hear. As if I'd have anything to do with an ugly guy like him! Did he have the face to say

that? If I'd heard him, I'd have scratched his eyes out."

"It seems to me that a girl who tells people where her room is shouldn't make such an ado about what I've said."

"My room? — me? I told him where my room is? O heavens! — can it be that — ha, ha, ha, ha!"

The servant, who had been purple with anger, suddenly went into a fit of laughter. I waited for some time for her to have done; the stout girl held her aching sides and was obliged to sit down before she could speak. She restrained herself at length.

"Need I tell you, monsieur, that the door I pointed out to your friend was not the door of my room, but one which leads to a large attic room which is well situated and always dry, for which reasons the master chose to put in it the fruits that he wants to keep, such as apples, pears, grapes, as well as the salted provisions and hams and sausages."

"That's all well and good, but I suppose your master fastens this door with a key?"

"Yes, monsieur, but in spite of that he declares that often something is stolen and for some days past, perhaps because he wants to catch the thieves, I've noticed that the storeroom door is only closed with a bolt."

"And this is where you sent my companion?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"I don't see what he can have been doing there all night — but he must be somewhere. Come, my girl, show me the way to your storeroom."

"Oh, I must go and get the master, because he has ordered us servants not to go there."

"A fig for his orders! I must find my companion, who can't have gone to visit the Hermitage or walk in the valley in his shirt and underdrawers."

"Well, it certainly isn't the custom to do that."

Declining to listen to the servant, who went to inform her master, I left my room, went upstairs, and down a long passage, at the end of which I perceived a door. The place was far from the rooms which were occupied, and if Raymond had called I could well understand that he would not have been heard. But why had he stayed there? — that was what I wanted to know. I pushed the door, which was not entirely closed, and saw my neighbor Raymond with one of his legs caught in a trap and seated on a pile of hams on which he had fallen asleep.

My entrance caused him to open his eyes. He extended his arms to me with an indescribably comical expression of countenance.

"Oh, my dear fellow, my saviour! — get me out of this, I beg of you."

"What the devil are you doing there?"

"Can't you see? I'm taken like a rat in a

trap. I've been here since one o'clock in the morning; I shouted and called, but no one came — so there was nothing to do but put up with it. Finding that nobody heard me I seated myself on the first thing I could find, and in the end I went to sleep; but I have pains in all my limbs. I shan't forget Montmorency for some time to come."

I had an almost irresistible desire to laugh, but Raymond's long face made me pity him. However, I was trying in vain to disengage him from the trap when our host arrived with his servant. At sight of the latter my poor companion made a most mournful grimace, while the fat girl laughed till she cried.

"Well, confound it, so I've caught my thief," said the host, as soon as he caught sight of Raymond, but as he came nearer what was his surprise to recognize in the supposed larder rifler the traveller to whom he had lent his slippers. Raymond told a plausible story of a little indisposition which had obliged him to rise in the night and that he had mistaken his way and so had got into the storeroom and stumbled into the trap.

Our host overwhelmed us with apologies. He alone knew the secret of opening the trap and he hastened to release my companion, who went to dress himself; but Raymond was in a very bad temper and did not care to walk out to admire the neighborhood. He feared that the night he had

passed on the hams in his shirt would give him rheumatism, and he looked forward to the moment when we could return to Paris. I might have rallied my companion on the hard luck which had pursued him in his intrigues, but I am generous, and I forebore. I left him rubbing (himself this time) his limbs and shoulders, and having breakfasted I went by myself to visit those delightful places of which Gretry and Jean-Jacques have so greatly increased the charm, for men of genius never entirely die. I shall not describe what my readers know as well as I; I can teach them nothing, and if I should chance to make a mistake, they would detect my blunders; but if I should some day go to a foreign country, some solitary place, if I should see a Gothic castle or some chapel falling into ruins, then I promise them a fine description, for I could then say all that came into my head without a fear that anyone would accuse me of untruth.

But let us return to Raymond, who was awaiting me impatiently. The cabriolet was repaired, the horse put in, we could start. I made my two invalids get into the vehicle, for Raymond was hardly in better condition than the groom, and he was barely able to move. I placed myself between them, like a rose between two thorns; and after paying the innkeeper's bill, in which the slippers that my companion was wearing to Paris figured prominently, I drove towards the capital, where we

arrived without accident simply because I declined to allow M. Raymond to touch the reins. Arrived at our dwelling, we had to pay for the cabriolet and indemnify the groom for his sprained foot. I paid, and I presented my companion with a list of our expenses since the evening before.

	f.	c.
For the cabriolet, which we had kept a day longer than we had agreed	30	00
For the peasant and his son, who had acted as our guide and helped us to get our horse up	6	00
For the hire of the donkeys up to midnight . . .	9	00
For repairs to the cabriolet	12	00
For the damage to the vines	5	00
For our sojourn at the inn, bed, supper, and breakfast	28	00
For slippers for M. Raymond	2	50
For the girl who rubbed M. Raymond	3	00
For fires in two bedrooms (something very rare) .	2	00
For the jockey who had crushed his foot in endeavoring to stop our horse	20	00
	117	50

In examining the total expenses of our pleasure party, to which he might have added his suit of clothing, almost entirely spoiled, from his hat to his shoes, Raymond heaved a deep sigh, and slowly took from his purse the fifty-eight francs, seventy-five centimes which he owed to me.

CHAPTER II

Suspicions of the Mind. Fears of the Heart. The Confidence. The Little Supper

Although, thanks to my neighbor Raymond's tiresome idiosyncrasies, I had been prevented from responding to Madame de Marsan's kind invitation, I made up my mind to pay her a visit at as early a date as possible to apologize for my absence on that occasion; but determined on going alone the next time, thinking that I should thus be enabled to arrive at my destination in proper order and due time.

Caroline, no doubt, was expecting me impatiently; I must, therefore, hasten to relieve her anxiety. I had promised her to return in the night, and should have done so but for the accidents of that eventful evening which had obliged me to put up at the inn at Montmorency, and await the repairing of our carriage before returning to Paris. At a little after two in the afternoon, therefore, I set out towards her apartments in the Rue Caumartin.

When I reached her house she was not at the window; but could I expect her to give herself a crick in the neck trying to catch the earliest

glimpse of me? No, I was too reasonable to exact such devotion as that. I went up to her rooms and rang, but nobody came, she had gone out. Tired of waiting for me she had gone for a walk, perhaps to make some new purchases, so I thought I would depart, to return later; but before leaving I rang again, with no better success than at first. I went down discontented, because I am easily vexed and nothing annoys one more than to have one's pleasure deferred. I had no right to be angry because she had gone out, but it seemed to me that she ought to have expected me. I departed, rubbing my ear, and I believe I was scowling too. Was it a presentiment? Alas! had I again failed of finding my faithful woman? — but I was not going to trouble myself beforehand, that would avail me nothing, in fact, I should try also not to trouble myself after the fact was assured; by that means I should certainly be much happier.

As I turned into the boulevard I saw her, and how she was got up for a mere morning walk! She saw me, she seemed embarrassed. However, she came towards me, we both smiled, though I think neither of us had a desire to do so; these forced smiles are so easily recognizable.

"Oh, is that you?"

"Yes, does it surprise you to see me?"

"Why, I did not expect you to be so late."

"It seems to me you didn't expect me at all."

"Have you come from my place?"

"Yes, and where have you been?"

"Oh, for a little walk."

"How you are figged out."

"Not more than usual, it seems to me."

"No, indeed — not in comparison with your dress when you lived in the Rue des Rosiers?"

"You always have something disagreeable to say to me."

"I don't see anything disagreeable in what I have just said."

"I ought, perhaps, to go out in an apron and a cap."

"They would not become you ill."

"I have no desire to wear them again, however."

"Oh, I believe that."

"It would seem, to hear you, that when you first knew me I was a very awkward country girl, and very simple into the bargain."

"Pardon me, I never took you for an innocent."

"Are we going to stay all day on the boulevard? I am going in; are you coming?"

I hesitated, and then I followed her. When we got into the house Caroline rallied me on the severity of my expression, and what reason had I, after all, to reproach her? I am rather unamiable sometimes, I know, and a scolding man is never loved. I kissed Caroline and we made it up. I dined with her, I took her to the play, I wanted to give her a little pleasure; but she did not seem

much amused; she was preoccupied, distrait, and I was almost tempted to quarrel with her. I restrained myself, however; she would say that I grumbled incessantly. But if she had been as she formerly was I should have had no reason for complaint. I repeat, that when one ceases to be pleasing it is because one has ceased to be loved.

It was nearly midnight when I entered my rooms. A secret hope caused me to carry my hand quickly to the lock; there was no bouquet, although this was the day on which it was usually left. Had Nicette forgotten me also? — That would pain me — pain me very deeply. But what childishness, can I expect this young girl to bring me flowers the whole year round when I never deign to go and give her the merest greeting? But in the depths of my heart I had not received with indifference these marks of her remembrance. I was sensible of them more, perhaps, than I believed myself to be; I felt it by the mortification I experienced at her neglect. I had become so accustomed to this homage that it seemed to me now that she owed it. And why should I hide it? I thought myself beloved of Nicette, I believed her capable of constancy; and while undesirous of betraying her affection, it gave me pleasure to think I had inspired it. I wished to inform myself as to her conduct; I wanted to see her, to speak to her. Tomorrow morning I would get up at six o'clock and go and hover round the little

flower-girl. How strange we are! For a month I had neglected Nicette, and because I thought she had forgotten me, my desire to see her, to learn what she was doing, and what was her feeling towards me, was ardently kindled.

Was it love on my part? or conceit? or jealousy? or vanity? — or was it simply curiosity?

As for Caroline, I shouldn't trouble myself any further about her, whether she was faithful or whether she was not. In the first case mine would be the wrong in suspecting her; in the second, she was unworthy either of my love or my regrets. Here is a fine way out of a dilemma which I submit to all jealous people now and hereafter. But they will answer that when one can talk reasonably one cannot be very much in love. To that I have nothing to answer, for I firmly believe it to be the truth.

I was up and about at six o'clock. I was sure at that hour not to meet any acquaintances before whom I should blush to be caught talking to a little flower-girl selling her wares in the street. When I reached the spot where Nicette set up her stand, no stand was there. Was it too early? — had she changed her location? I went up to a street messenger who was sitting near by, thinking that, like the rest of his class, he would know all about the neighborhood.

"Used there not to be a flower-girl here, my man, opposite this house?"

"Yes, and she was there, monsieur, up to a week ago."

"And is she no longer there?"

"Oh, she isn't very far off — about thirty steps lower down; you'll see a little shop — that's where she is now.

"A shop, do you say?"

"Yes, monsieur; it's not a very large one, but it's very well arranged for all that."

I was about to go on my way when it occurred to me that I might get some information concerning Nicette from this man. Nicette in a shop of her own? — what ought I to conclude from that? I trembled to think of it. Could some one else have been more fortunate than I?—had she listened to another, and this treasure which it had cost me so much to respect did another possess it?

I drew nearer to the messenger; I put some money into his hand, and I began to question him.

"Do you know this flower-girl."

"Yes, monsieur, I know her,— but I am not familiar with her, for she is very proud. She hardly speaks to anyone except her customers, and not long to them; if they are too free with their conversation she sends them walking. Hang it! she's a well-conducted girl, she's virtuous, look you, and a virtuous girl is always respected."

The man's eulogy of Nicette gave me the keenest pleasure; I should have been grieved to learn

anything that would have caused me to lose my respect for her.

"You say she is well-conducted?"

"Yes, monsieur; oh, people like myself know everything that is passing. It's not because Mamzelle Nicette lacks admirers. Oh, hang it! she could have everybody in the neighborhood if she wanted — she is so pretty, and she has a great many customers. Why, it's scarcely six weeks since she came to establish herself in this street, but all the same the young men soon found her out and her place is always full of dandies who come to buy flowers in order that they may get a word with the pretty flower-girl — you know how that is; but Mamzelle Nicette sells her flowers only, she doesn't deal in pretty speeches. One justice I must render her, she pays no more attention to the swells than she does to the lackeys, and when some evil-disposed person orders flowers to be sent home he always gets caught, for she sends them by the barber's little girl."

I went off, highly delighted at all I had learned, and a few steps brought me to Nicette's shop. She had already arranged her flower-pots on the shelves placed outside the door. When she saw me she uttered an exclamation of surprise, the violets she held dropped from her hands, she blushed and found difficulty in murmuring,—

"What, monsieur, is it you?"

I smiled at her astonishment and went into the

shop with her. I seated myself on a stool, and looked around me. How pretty she was! and how pleasure heightened her charms; it shone in her eyes as she looked at me.

"Is it really you, M. Dorsan? You in my little shop! I did not expect so much pleasure — I no longer hoped for it."

"Why was that, Nicette?"

"It is such a long time since I saw you."

"That is true; but I have occupations which do not allow me to —"

"Oh, monsieur, I can well understand that; besides, it is for you to please yourself, and can you think of a flower-girl?"

There was something so touching in the manner in which she said this that I could not help feeling moved. How could I have forgotten her beauty, her candor, and her sensibility? I could not for the life of me understand.

She was still standing before me; I took her hand, I put my arm around her waist and drew her to me; she allowed me to do so, though she looked uneasily about her. In a moment I saw how imprudently I was acting, for we were in full sight of the passers-by and some one might come in at any moment. Her reputation was her only wealth; poor little thing, she was conscious that my conduct might blemish it, but she feared to displease me.

I took away my arms and moved from her as I

looked into the street; she understood me, and her eyes thanked me.

"You have rented a shop, Nicette?"

"Yes, monsieur, I have made a good deal of money since I've been in this neighborhood; I economize and I scarcely spend anything, I am certain that I can manage a business. I haven't done so badly, have I?"

"No, I should say not; I know that your conduct is everything that it should be."

"You know it, monsieur?"

"I never had any doubt of it. Your bouquets have proved to me how grateful is your heart."

"How could I forget what you have done for me?"

"You have not made any acquaintances in this street?"

"No, monsieur, I do not wish to make any."

"You do not get lonely, living as you do?"

"How can I be lonely, when I always have something to think of?"

"What do you do with your evenings?"

"I read, and I am learning to write."

"You know how to write?"

"A little; I shall soon know more about it, I hope. An old gentleman gives me lessons sometimes."

"But you don't need to know anything further."

"That's true, monsieur, and if it pleases you I won't learn anything else."

"I don't say that at all; study, Nicette, since it affords you pleasure. You were not made to sell bouquets, but believe me, and do not seek to leave the position in which fate has placed you, for that rarely brings success."

"Nothing is further from my thoughts, monsieur; only, I should like to improve myself and not remain the stupid girl I am now."

"My dear girl, you may be ignorant of many things, but you could never be stupid, you will always be charming; your natural intelligence needs not to be instructed in order to please, as your personal attractions do not need the art of the toilet to heighten them. Dear Nicette, remain always just as you were when I first met you; do not seek to change."

She listened to me in silence, her gentle glance approved all I said; we understood each other so well! But customers were coming to look at the flowers, I needs must go. I said good-by to her, but still I lingered, I felt that it was impossible that I should kiss her there; she divined my thoughts, we both sighed. To part so coldly was hard; if only we had been in my rooms. I had but to say the word and she would come, I was sure, but I could not say this word, else had Nicette ceased to be — Nicette.

I pressed her hand and I escaped, for I felt that I must fly from this adorable girl.

Even as a happy change in one's destiny recon-

ciles one anew with life, as a favorable throw of the dice brings us in contact with wealth, as a good trait reconciles a misanthrope with humanity, as the reception of a play calms the ill-humor of an author, as a bottle of old wine makes a drunkard forget his vows of reformation, as a ray of the sun causes the traces of the storm to disappear — even so the sight of a pretty woman makes us forget our wisest projects; her love effaces from our mind the remembrance of our last mistress, and her virtues make us feel friendly again to that sex which we swear to shun every time we are deceived; but we do not fly, because that would be to affront nature.

Thus the sight of Nicette always made me esteem her more highly. I reproached myself with sometimes speaking ill of a sex among whom are to be found models of sensibility, delicacy, and sweetness, and who often redeem their frailty by a thousand virtues. After seeing her I thought I had been wrong to suspect Caroline, in whose conduct I had seen nothing to awaken my jealousy; one often, by reproaches that are ill-founded, embitters a heart that one might have attached.

I even went so far as to say to myself that it was my own fault that I had been betrayed so often; that I had always acted in a way that would infallibly lose any woman's love. One goes to great lengths in proposing syllogisms to one's self. If I went on like this I should end by proving

to myself that women's unfaithfulness was but the result of our conduct towards them. I reached Tortoni's at the moment that Raymond was going into that resort with a gentleman of some sixty summers, rather ill built, with a stupid and disagreeable face, and obliged to support himself on a cane by reason of the lameness of his left leg; his dress gave an impression of wealth and his manners were full of pretension.

I did not care to seat myself in the vicinity of these gentlemen, despite Raymond's solicitations, for he shouted to me that we would breakfast together. I pretended not to understand him and placed myself in a corner, far from my neighbor, of whom I was more wary since our journey to Montmorency. But as I sipped my chocolate I noticed that the conversation of these gentlemen was very animated. I ventured to wager that the old dandy was bragging to his friend about his conquests, which he took care to boast loudly, to give himself the air of a young gallant. Would he not have done better in caring for his infirmities? However, he rose and I thought that Raymond was going to follow him, but no, he came towards me,—

"Good-morning, my dear fellow; well, have you recovered from the effects of our journey?"

"Is it necessary for you to ask that? Thank heaven! I did not have to sleep on a pile of hams, with my legs snared like a lark's."

"How witty you are! Though to be sure, I must have looked like a sparrow; but I don't feel it any longer, I rubbed myself so well yesterday. I used two bottles of salve for the skin and three flasks of Ceylon oil, so this morning I had all my usual elasticity. But say, do you know the person with whom I was talking just now?"

"No."

"That was M. de Grandmaison."

"I've never even heard of him."

"He's a very rich man — immensely rich."

"He's immensely ugly."

"He was formerly a financialist, a contractor, a manufacturer."

"Yes, I understand."

"He gives delightful balls."

"He doesn't give them that he may dance himself, that's a sure thing."

"He's still a jolly grig."

"He doesn't look like it."

"Because he drags one leg a little — that doesn't prevent him from succeeding in his little flirtations."

"Anyone may succeed with money."

"That's just what I was trying to tell you, but it comes to the same thing. I confess, between ourselves, that he will never set the Thames on fire and that his education is bounded by the rules of multiplication and subtraction, which he understands most thoroughly; but, for all that, he

is acquainted with some of the prettiest women in Paris."

"That doesn't redound to the credit of the prettiest women of Paris."

"He was telling me just now of a little affair which he is just bringing to an issue. Ha, ha! it's very comical. This is a ravishing young beauty who's going to give a slap in the face to a young man."

"Some one of the demi-monde, I suppose."

"It seems that the little girl has some idea as to her own worth, and that she makes conditions; and then the young man is jealous, no doubt, and keeps a tight hand over her. In spite of which Grandmaison saw her at the window first, then came notes, proposals! Grandmaison, who knows how to manage these affairs, offered cashmere shawls, diamonds; the little one is coquettish, and it seems her young lover maintained her only on a bourgeoise footing — the poor fellow will soon be ousted."

I experienced a certain uneasiness, of which I dared not acknowledge the cause, even to myself; Raymond's story, to which I had listened mechanically, had now become intensely interesting to me; the words, cashmere shawls, window, jewels, awoke certain suspicions in my mind, though when I remembered the appearance and age of M. de Grandmaison I reddened because I for a moment gave them room in my thoughts. My self-con-

ceit would not for a moment admit that I could be discarded for such a rival; but a secret voice told me that self-conceit often deceives one. I wished to assure myself of the truth, and I addressed some questions to Raymond, the answers to which I was certain would prove that I was wrong to make myself uneasy.

"Where does this M. de Grandmaison live?"

"In the Rue Caumartin, in a fine house which he owns — almost at the entrance of the boulevard."

I felt a shiver through all my frame, my heart was constricted, and a weight seemed placed upon my chest, and all this was the effect of a single word in a single second. I continued, however, affecting the greatest calmness,—

"And this young beauty, where does she reside?"

"She lodges opposite him in a small house where there's no porter, in the second floor front. Grandmaison saw her at her window first; the street is wide, but he has a superb opera glass which he had made on purpose that he might look at the ballets at the opera. It's like a small telescope, and allows you to see the most distant objects, which is very convenient for watching the dancer's pirouettes —"

"Come, make an end of it — what about this young woman?"

"As I told you, with his opera glass he assured

himself that she was young and pretty, well-made and unfaded. His glasses serve him in good stead, I can tell you."

"But what of the lover?"

"The lover doesn't live with her, he comes to see her very often, but he doesn't exhibit himself at the window; that's why Grandmaison hasn't been seen by him, for he takes care to quit his window as soon as the young man arrives."

"Well, what else?"

"Why, everything is going as smoothly as possible. Grandmaison took the little one to a close box at the opera night before last, precisely because the young man was in the country."

At this point I could not contain myself, and, without realizing what I was doing, I gave a violent blow to the table that was between me and my neighbor. The shock was so great that the cup of chocolate flew into Raymond's face, for in speaking to me he had leaned over the table; the remainder of the beverage was dispersed on the vest and necktie of my neighbor, who started back, frightened by a gesture which I involuntarily made.

Ashamed of allowing him to see my uneasiness, my spite, my fury, I tried to draw myself together. I composed my face and excused myself to Raymond, who did not know whether to approach me again, and asked for a glass of water that he might wipe the chocolate off his face.

Grandpapa took the little one to a close box at the opera.

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ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R L

"Pardon, a thousand pardons, my dear Raymond, I don't know what possessed me. You were saying that the day before yesterday —"

"You frightened me terribly — do you have nervous attacks?"

"No, no, it was merely absence of mind. You were saying —"

"The deuce! you ought to guard against that. Now, because of you, I must go and change my waistcoat and shirt."

"Oh, that's nothing. The day before yesterday then, as you were saying, he took this young woman to the opera — to a closed box."

"Yes, yes, have I some on my face still?"

"Nothing at all, your face is as charming as usual. Go on."

This compliment put Raymond in a good-humor, he hid his shirt frill by tucking it in, and resumed the conversation.

"Yes, they had a small box."

"Which means that the affair is settled."

"No, not yet; you can understand that the lady stood on ceremony and that Grandmaison is not the man to do things so abruptly; of course, a lame man like he can only go at a halting pace; had it been either you or I the affair would have been ended — but we are jolly fellows, we two."

"And what has transpired since then?"

"He saw the little one yesterday morning 'extra muros.' He has promised her a magnificent

cashmere shawl, and everything fit for a begum, if she would come to supper at his house; and what is more, a complete set of apartments, a maid to wait on her, a carriage at her orders, and a hundred louis a month, if she will consent to stay there."

"Well, what of it?"

"She has accepted."

"She has accepted?"

I rose so suddenly that Raymond threw himself back in his chair and looked at me uneasily.

"What is the matter, neighbor, have you another attack?"

"No, there's nothing the matter with me. Let's go and get a little air." And I led Raymond off by the arm. He followed me, making a grimace; no doubt I pinched his arm without perceiving it, for he begged me to let him go — but I did not heed him.

"My dear Dorsan, you are twitching like everything; leave go of my arm, if you please."

Oh, the women, the women; but why should my heart be constricted thus, for I really did not love her.

"My dear fellow, do release me, I beg of you."

"It's cruel indeed, always to find one's self the plaything of fate; to be incessantly deceived — and for whom, I ask of you?"

"I don't know what you are asking me; but let me go, you are making me ill — I shall be obliged to call somebody."

"There can be no doubt — it is really she — I must bring her to confusion — Raymond!"

I turned towards my companion, whose piteous face and frightened eyes I noticed for the first time. I loosed his arm and, being a little calmer, asked him what was the matter with him.

"What is the matter with me? The deuce! You must have an attack of brain fever — you squeezed my arm till I shouted — you uttered exclamations that I did not understand."

"It was because I was thinking of something. I will explain to you later on; but now, to return to your friend's intrigue, it amuses me very much. So M. de Grandmaison sups this evening with his new flame?"

"Yes, this evening."

"I am very curious to see this woman as you say she is so pretty."

"Well, I'm curious too, for I don't know her any more than you do, and I shall greatly enjoy seeing her."

"What, are you going to see her?"

"Certainly; I'm invited to the supper. I and five or six other fellows, chums of Grandmaison. He thinks it would be rather dull to spend the whole evening alone with her; so to make the time pass a little more gayly he invited a few friends to supper, to cheer the lady's spirits."

"Very considerate of him, and how delightful for the guests."

"Oh, as for that, our turn may come later. These women soon get tired of a peevish old invalid like Grandmaison."

"I understand; you are his friend and you wish to supplant him."

"Oh, I'm everything to everybody. We amuse ourselves, I can tell you, at these little suppers; we laugh like mad people. The cheer is delicious, the wine of the best, no embarrassment, no ceremony; we jest, we sing, we drink, and such joking, such puns, such 'double entendres,' such spicy anecdotes, such jolly couplets! It's a rolling fire, everybody's talking at once, and no one hears anyone else; it's delightful."

"You make me sorry that I can't be among you."

"Would you really like to come, my dear fellow? Deuce take it! if it will afford you any pleasure I'll take it upon me to introduce you."

"What, really, can you do so?"

"I can do anything I wish; you know of old how successful I am."

"I had forgotten that — but then M. de Grandmaison doesn't know me."

"What has that to do with it? I know you, and that is sufficient. Presented by Raymond, you will be welcome."

"Do you really think I may venture?"

"Why, of course, anyone who is cheerful and can make a good joke or relate a racy anecdote is

always well received at Grandmaison's; that is why he is so fond of me."

"Oh, if it is but a question of a farce I promise you one for this evening."

"You are our man, that's understood and decided. Meet me at the Café Anglais at ten o'clock this evening, that's the hour at which we are to assemble."

"I'll be there, I promise you."

"But if you'll be advised by me you'd better take a little orange-flower to calm your nerves."

"Don't be alarmed, I shan't have another attack."

"Good-by, then, till this evening at ten o'clock."

Raymond left me, and I reflected long on all I had learned. The woman was Caroline, I could not doubt it, though a faint hope still lingered in the depths of my heart. I would go to her, taking care to hide what I felt; I would try to read her soul — to divine her treason in her eyes; but, above all, I would be reasonable, philosophical and try to profit by these four lines,—

> The fatuous noise their woes abroad;
> The fool's complaint is heard;
> The honest man, deceived, departs,
> And never says a word.

I found her at home. My arrival did not appear to embarrass her at all; she received me, spoke to me, smiled at me in her customary manner. I wondered if I had been wrong in suspecting her.

However, she did not notice my uneasiness. The secret agitation which I felt obliged to hide would not have escaped the eyes of one who loved me. Those who love one see everything, divine everything, and Caroline asked me not a single question, though I was in a fever of impatience and hardly knew what I was saying, though I was ready to break forth into indignation and could hardly restrain myself under the torture I was experiencing. No, she no longer loved me.

I told her that I expected to pass the day with her. I thought I discovered embarrassment in the looks she cast upon me, but she recovered herself immediately.

"It always gives me a great deal of pleasure to have you stay with me," she said, in that sweet voice which had so charmed me in our meeting on the boulevard. These voices are deceiving, like everything else. In vain I tried to compose my features and to look as though I felt cheerful; I could not manage it. I still felt something stifle me, choke me. I had experienced that feeling so many times before. I went to the window, but immediately drew back. I must not let anyone be able to recognize me this evening. How long the day seemed! I hurried the dinner and never, I believe, had I found a meal so dull. Caroline complained of the headache; as for me, I did not complain.

If I could but speak to her of love; I did my

best, but she answered me only with commonplaces. It is very stupid when two people who have ceased to love try to converse on that theme.

I invited her to come to the play. She declined, and her headache increased; she felt ill at ease. Perfidious woman, I understood her. Why did she not say to me frankly, "I love you no longer." I should have minded it less had she acted thus. But to add to her inconstancy, falsehood and dissimulation, to try still to deceive me!

"Would you like me to stay with you?" said I, affecting solicitude for her health.

"No — no, I thank you, I only need rest. Tomorrow I shall be all right again."

She could not hide the fear my proposition caused her, for it would entirely derange her plans. I might have prevented the execution of them on that evening by remaining with her, but to what purpose? I could only retard the moment, and I should not have the pleasure of confounding her. I could not defer that instant, I wished it had already arrived. When we are about to experience some pain the moments which precede it are more painful than those which follow it.

Eight o'clock struck. She said she would go to bed and try to sleep — this was to give me the signal for departure. I said good-by to her and she came up to kiss me — she pressed my hand, her eyes were dry, she was not agitated. I left, and it was high time, for I was going to be jilted.

I was not sorry to have a couple of hours to myself before it was necessary to join Raymond. I should have time to calm myself and to resolve upon my course of action. I felt already that the clearer air had done me good. I have noticed a hundred times that the condition of the atmosphere has a good deal to do with one's mental condition, especially so is it with those who have the misfortune to possess excitable nerves. A slight shower, a little thunder and lightning, calms or excites one's feelings, but those things are natural and therefore inevitable and one must submit to them; thanks to heaven, I know how to do that and I am not of the opinion of those who affirm that they are all.

She had left for me her aunt, her little Jules, and a good many others, wherefore should she not leave me also for some one else? She no longer loved me, but that was not a crime; she had deceived me, it was that I believed that vexed me the most, for one is humiliated by being deceived, above all when one is of an age to deceive himself.

But, after all, a connection such as ours must end sooner or later. What matter which? True, I no longer loved her, and that I felt sure was the reason I had such a grudge against her. I felt spiteful at being forestalled. Love will forgive many things that self-conceit will not excuse.

What if I should be deceived by Nicette? Ah,

then I felt my trouble would be very different. I recalled the extent of my uneasiness, my agitation, when I learned that she had taken a shop, although I was no more to her than a friend. I determined that to think of Nicette would be the best antidote against my remembrance of Caroline's perfidy.

I traversed all the boulevards. I had had time to think it over, and had entirely made up my mind. I felt that one must needs be a fool to be angry at his betrayal by a woman who had betrayed others for him. How can one rely on the faith of a person who gives one as guaranty only infidelities?

I decided, therefore, to amuse myself at Mademoiselle Caroline's expense. This is the best vengeance one can inflict on a woman who has deceived one. Those who show hate, spite or jealousy merely show that they still love; there is no vengeance there.

Promptly by ten I was at the Café Anglais. I took some punch while awaiting Raymond; I did not wish to stupefy myself, but only to attain that slight degree of exhilaration which allows one to bear amiably with the follies of others. My neighbor arrived in the elegant negligé of one "on folly bent"; one would have imagined from his radiantly cheerful expression that he was the hero of the feast this evening.

"We are going to have a gay time of it, my

boy," said he, seating himself near me, and resting his elbow on a neighboring table without noticing that he put it in some rice and milk with which an elderly frequenter of the café was regaling himself.

"Why the devil don't you take care what you are doing, monsieur?" said the old gentleman, looking up from his paper. Raymond stammered his excuses, and took his elbow so suddenly from the potage that he upset the bowl of rice over the white trousers of a young dandy, who was reading the "Journal des Modes." The young dandy shouted loudly, the elderly gentleman apostrophized Raymond rudely, and I saw that his excuses would only make matters irremediable. Not caring that another adventure should prevent our reaching M. de Grandmaison's, I hastened to do my utmost to calm and appease these gentlemen; I succeeded at length in doing so, and fearing some new accident I drew Raymond from the café.

"It seems to me the evening is beginning badly," said I, as I led him towards the Rue Caumartin.

"Pshaw, quite the contrary; we shall be gay enough. It wasn't my fault if that old politician put his rice right under my arm. He should have been eating it instead of reading the journal and that little accident could not have happened. But it is half past ten, we must hasten; I will wager they are waiting for us."

"That is to say, for you."

"Oh, I wrote a word to Grandmaison to warn

him that I should bring an intimate friend with me, so they will expect you also."

We reached the Rue Caumartin and entered a handsome hotel situated directly opposite Caroline's rooms; we ascended a fine staircase, we crossed several antechambers lighted by luminous globes attached to the ceiling and tenanted by half a dozen yawning lackeys. Everything bespoke ostentation and opulence. I had had nothing like this to offer her. I had thought I was doing a good deal for her, I had embarrassed myself, gone into debt, and what return had she made me for it? Oh, I should long remember the rôle I had played with Caroline.

My heart beat a little faster as I drew near the small drawing-room where the company was awaiting us, but I soon recovered myself. We went in and I saw four men, but the master of the dwelling was not among them.

"How do you do, my dear fellows!" said Raymond, hastening to shake hands with all these gentlemen, "This is my friend who was desirous of sharing our entertainment this evening. But where's Grandmaison?"

"In his sitting-room — he's getting better acquainted with his little friend before supper."

"Oh, of course; that's right, that's right, they'll soon get to understand each other. Have you seen her, gentlemen?"

"Not yet, They say she is charming."

"She's more than that, and she is as demure as a little nun."

"Deuce take it! that's most extraordinary."

"Grandmaison advises us to be not quite so free of speech, a little more decorous than is usual on such occasions."

"That's good; we must get to our usual point of jollity by slow gradations, so as not to scare her. She'll get used to us and our jokes."

"Yes, but Grandmaison isn't the one to help her to do so; it'll be as much as he can do to make a feeble joke or two — after supper."

"He isn't quite so broadly witty as 'Joconde.'"

"No, but his wine is delicious, and he has an excellent cook."

"'Pon honor, I have a great esteem for him."

"For the cook?"

"No, for Grandmaison, my jocular friend. Come, gentlemen, no words of doubtful meaning tonight. As for me, I believe in respecting the convenances everywhere and always."

During this pleasing conversation I amused myself by examining these gentlemen. One, a stout, short, round and red little man, contented himself with laughing at the jokes uttered by the others, but did not say anything himself. The one who spoke the most was a little man of fifty years, who wished to impress himself upon the younger men as a most determined rake by giving utterance to all the ribald jests and anecdotes that came into his

head. A thin, young man, pale and livid, whose eyes declared his abuse of life, was extended on a sofa, fidgeting, and limply applauding Raymond's witticisms. A tall, broad-shouldered personage, with a dull, stupid face, who had eyes like an ox and a nose that would have shamed a lobster, completed the gathering; when I arrived no one was lacking save the Baron Witcheritche.

Finally a door at the end of the room opened and M. de Grandmaison entered, dragging his left leg. But he was alone.

"Where is she? where is she?" cried all these gentlemen at the same time.

"One moment, just one moment, and you shall see her; she's repairing her toilet a little. When I told her I had friends to supper she did not wish to appear in negligé — besides, I am not sorry for you to see the presents I've made her. I've left her with a lady's maid. We'll have a little patience and some punch while we are waiting for supper."

Raymond presented me to M. de Grandmaison, who overwhelmed me with commonplace compliments for caring to attend his little party. As I answered him I was dreadfully afraid lest he should recognize me; but my fears were soon dissipated when I saw that M. de Grandmaison had need of his opera glasses to see anything at all.

An enormous bowl of punch was now brought in, to which these gentlemen did so much honor that I wondered what would be their condition

when we went to the table. The big gentleman with the stupid face, whom they called "my lord," did nothing but fill and empty his glass, while the little roué, whose name was Zamorin, stuffed himself with macaroons, wafers and biscuits in order to sustain himself until supper was served.

The old libertine and the young-old man languidly talked and inquired as to the face of Grandmaison's new flame, and the host detailed her charms, but said they would see her for themselves by and by.

"What is her name?" inquired Raymond.

"She is called Madame Saint-Leon. It is a pretty name, is it not, gentlemen?"

"Yes, very pretty; I like the name."

"Has she any children?"

"What an idiotic question! did I not tell you that she was almost an ingenue?"

"Yes, but almost isn't quite."

"Come, hold your tongue, Raymond."

"You are blackening innocence," said M. Rocambelle (the old man) jocularly. "I am certain that Grandmaison picked out this little girl from among the Virtues."

Delighted at his little joke, M. Rocambolle turned laughing towards the young man, whose answering grin showed several yellow teeth, the only ones that remained to him.

In the midst of the general hubbub, as I was averse to appearing bored by the charming society

of these gentlemen, I said everything that came into my head, and had occasionally, without troubling myself at all to bring it about, the satisfaction of making these jolly fellows laugh. Raymond exclaiming,—

"I told you he was a witty fellow — a delightful man!"

So it appeared that I pleased them, though I swear I took no pains to do so; but I believe these gentlemen were disposed to be pleased at anything and everything. The supper was announced. Grandmaison looked at his watch.

"It's three-quarters of an hour since I left her, she ought to be ready; I'll go and see. Go into the supper room, and I will bring her to you."

He departed, and Raymond, who was familiar with the arrangements, led us into a circular room in the midst of which was a table garnished with all that could flatter the sight, the smell, or the taste.

A beautiful clock placed on a little mantelpiece of white marble informed us that it was nearly midnight.

"The devil!" said M. Rocambolle; "midnight already — we shall hardly have time to divert ourselves."

"Nor to eat," said Zamorin.

"Wait a bit, messieurs," said Raymond, who was always looking for a means of showing himself off. "I'm going to put the clock back an hour."

"A good idea, a good idea," they all exclaimed. "This deuce of a fellow Raymond is never at a loss! — he's as inventive as a little girl."

Delighted at having shown the resources of his imagination, Raymond ran to the clock. He lifted with dangerous haste the globe which covered it, he turned the hands, he put in the key and turned it so as to retard the timepiece and, from the way in which he was going it, I presumed it would not be midnight for two hours yet. Our attention was now distracted by the sound of M. de Grandmaison's voice; this announced the approach of the person whom the guests were all expecting with much less impatience than I.

All eyes were turned towards the door where she was about to enter; only I withdrew to one side so as not to be seen at first. We could already hear the rustling of her gown. At this moment a loud snapping resounded through the room; Raymond had managed to break the big spring of the clock, and in order to hide his stupidity he left the fireplace and ran to meet the beauty who was to be presented to us.

She appeared at length, conducted by M. de Grandmaison and Raymond, who had seized her other hand and was saying all the pretty things he could think of. I saw her, and my heart beat more violently, my chest was oppressed. This was the last time that her presence produced any effect upon me.

Her toilet was magnificent, a collar of emeralds shone on her breast, a very beautiful comb and some girandoles heightened the effect of her coiffure. She appeared with her eyes lowered, and assumed an air of modesty almost similar to that with which she had deceived me on the occasion of our first meeting. This woman knew how to change her expression as she wished. I was waiting to see how she would bear the sight of me.

At length she raised her eyes on the company, a concert of praises and of compliments immediately ensued; she was, indeed, very handsome, and these gentlemen were hard put to it to find expressions that were sufficiently ardent to express their admiration, their delight. How happy was Caroline at that moment, she blushed to the forehead, but it was with pleasure, with pride, and not with modesty.

"But where's my friend got to?" cried Raymond, looking around for me. He perceived me in the corner, from whence I was watching the scene, and hastening towards me drew my arm in his and led me towards Caroline.

"Come along," said he, "come and see the three Graces in one, she is Hebe, Venus, Psyche, she's —"

Raymond was interrupted by an exclamation from Caroline. She looked at me at the moment when I was paying my compliments to and felicitating M. de Grandmaison. She turned very pale,

uneasy, she tried to pull herself together, but her emotion was too strong; she tottered and fell over on her new adorer. The latter, who was then occupied in responding to the congratulations of his friends, received the impact of the young woman just as he was in the act of taking a pinch from his gold snuff-box and thinking of something smart to say to those gentlemen; the poor man lacked strength to sustain the unexpected shock, his left leg was never very steady, and Caroline's weight sent his right one from under him. M. de Grandmaison fell heavily, trying to hold himself up by whatever was nearest him, and he seized Rocambolle's leg, as he thought, instead of which he had only caught hold of a mass of cotton padding with which the old dandy had sought to qualify his attenuated and shrunken limbs and give himself the contour of an Apollo or an Adonis; the cassimere of his garment gave way, and the huge mass of cotton remained in M. de Grandmaison's hand.

While M. Rocambolle angrily possessed himself of his padding, while the young man with the broken teeth threw himself into an easy chair laughing like a madman, while my lord looked at everything with eyes which seemed as though they were starting from their sockets, Raymond, who wished to make himself of service in setting things to rights, darted suddenly towards the table to find something to revive the fainting woman, and in

trying to reach a carafe of water he upset two bottles of madeira and overturned a candelabra, the candles of which were promptly extinguished on a mould of frozen cream; the bottles of madeira rolled off the table on to the host's face. M. de Grandmaison swore that his nose was broken, while Zamorin shouted for help as he saw the havoc Raymond was making in the supper; the footmen came running, but their presence only augmented the disorder. Caroline was still unconscious, or pretended to be so in order to hide her embarrassment, M. de Grandmaison continued to swear, Rocambolle to shout, Zamorin to lament, the young man to laugh, the Englishman tried to put some bottles of champagne in a safe place, and Raymond in his efforts to aid the pretty woman, pick up Grandmaison, and establish order, upset the furniture, broke bottles, smashed plates, sent a turkey into the face of one person, a tart on to the knees of another, and ended by falling himself on to a stand filled with liqueurs and fruits preserved in brandy.

What should I now do at M. de Grandmaison's? My vengeance was complete, the tumult was at its height; the scene of pleasure was turned into one of disorder and discomfort, shouts had succeeded the pæans of praise, laments the witty sayings, anger the intoxicating delight, sadness the cheerfulness — to sum up, Caroline had seen and recognized me and the effect had surpassed all my

desires. I was satisfied; and leaving each one to get out of the situation as best he could I departed from M. de Grandmaison's house, completely cured of the feeling with which the young flower-maker had inspired me.

CHAPTER III

The Two Visits. The Writing Lesson

On the morning after M. Grandmaison's party some one rang my bell at half-past nine.

I was still in bed, though very much awake and reviewing in my memory the episode of the evening before. The events which on that occasion could not evoke from me the ghost of a smile — because anger and the last pangs of a moribund jealousy had dominated me and prevented me from seeing the comical side of the affair — now caused me to laugh long and heartily.

Now that my head was cooler, my mind calmer, and my spirit no longer tormented by the expectancy of a certain event which at that time I had feared, and which had now transpired, making far less havoc in my heart or mind than I had expected, I recalled with lively satisfaction the several persons whom I had left at M. de Grandmaison's house; I pictured them standing around the lost supper which had been upset by Raymond's officious awkwardness and I laughed as gleefully as if I had been in the midst of them.

If at this moment some curious person — led there by the Diable boiteux or any other hobgob-

lin — had been perched on the window-sill of my room amusing himself by looking at me, he would have thought I had a fit of insanity. I don't know why it should be so much more extraordinary to laugh at one's remembrances than to cry, but certain it is that no one is ever surprised at seeing one shed tears, though if one happens to laugh to one's self they look at one as though one were a madman or an idiot; are tears so much more natural than laughter?

My portress, who, as I think I have said before, attended to the work of my rooms every morning, opened my door and admitted my neighbor Raymond. Hearing my laughter, he thought his appearance had provoked it, and was for a moment undecided whether he should be angry or share in my gayety; he prudently chose the latter course and drew near the bed giggling.

"Well, my dear fellow," quoth I, "the evening was exciting enough!"

"He, he, he! you were imagining you were there still, were you not?"

"Yes; but I expect you to give me the details of the denouement."

"And I expect an explanation."

"Of what? Do you want another meeting in the Bois-de-Boulogne?"

"No, no; what a fellow you are for joking. But, come now, that little Caroline didn't faint without reason when she saw you."

"The reason is simplicity itself; I am the young man whom M. de Grandmaison has replaced."

"Is it possible? What an unique adventure! And I took you to the supper, I introduced you to poor Grandmaison. But why the devil didn't you tell me? You don't place the least confidence in me, although I am devoted to you."

"I wanted to surprise you all."

"You were quite successful."

"But, come, how did the evening terminate?"

"Very dismally indeed. Nobody had any supper. The young woman wished to retire. Grandmaison's face was cut by a flask of wine which had fallen on him, I know not how, and he asked us to leave him that he might go to bed. But I hardly think he would pass so comfortable a night as he had hoped. As for the rest of us, we came off in a bad-enough humor. Rocambolle was regretting the cotton symmetry of his nether limbs, Zamorin the supper, and the others the young beauty with whom they had hoped to commence a little flirtation. That only left me, and I know how to console myself for everything, as you very well know. But I must confess that I was impatient to see you, to learn the cause of this catastrophe, which turned the fête into a fracas. I almost ventured to knock at your door last night that I might have known the sooner!"

"It was well for you that you let me sleep in peace."

"Well, I must leave you neighbor; but I do beg of you another time to have a little more confidence in me. You know how discreet I am. People may tell me anything and it will remain an inviolable secret. I should have made a good inquisitor or a — or a visionary. I love secrets and I'm extremely secret about keeping them, the proof of which is that I am a Freemason — and have I ever divulged the secrets of the craft?"

"You have told me that there was nothing secret about it."

"That's true, that's true, but I said that the better to deceive you. Good-by, neighbor. Oh, by the way, you haven't heard the news; they say that the Baron Witcheritche is going to bring a suit against his wife. It seems that an amateur who plays the serpent wanted to teach the baron's wife to operate that instrument, and the baron consented because it was as well for her to have another instrument at her fingers' ends and might serve on occasion. Besides, the baron was desirous of composing some little duets for the violin and the serpent, to play in company with his wife. Very well; this amateur goes to give the baroness lessons in the morning, but one fine day Witcheritche, whom they supposed to be in the country, returned home very inopportunely and found the amateur giving an extra lesson on the serpent to the baroness. Such an amount of music was too much for Witcheritche, who swore and shouted; his wife cried, and

the amateur made off as fast as possible—in short, there has been a scandal. I met little Friquet, who told me all about it; he heard it from his aunt, who learned it from Madame Bertin, and she was told it by Crachini, who got it from Gripaille, the informant of the latter being a damsel who lives in the Witcheritche house. But I say that one mustn't lightly believe such gossip, one must trace things back to their source. I shall go this morning to the baron's, I shall notice particularly if there is any coolness between him and his wife and, without appearing to do so, I shall manage to get the whole story from them by speaking of the serpent. Good-by. I'm going to finish a little vaudeville for some people in the Rue de Chartres."

"What! you don't mean to say you've had a play accepted by one of the theatres?"

"Oh, I've had several accepted at various places."

"It's confoundedly curious that I never saw one played anywhere."

"I was about to explain that to you. It arises from the fact that when I find my pieces are not staged at once, I withdraw them. I'm a determined fellow, and quick as a shot I withdraw anything that is not put on as soon as I demand it. It's the same with my pictures, my little water-colors. I don't send them to the Salon for fear they'll be hung in a bad light. One must have a certain degree of pride; people of real talent are

usually sufficient unto themselves, though it sometimes happens that their armor is pierced. Good-by, neighbor, I'll leave you to dress yourself."

"That man ought to be happy," said I to myself, thinking of Raymond, "he has no doubts about himself, he thinks he possesses wit, talents, and personal attractions. If a woman refuses to listen to him he says to himself that she is afraid of loving him too much, if his verses are not printed it's because the publishers are ignorant, if his plays are not accepted a cabal of authors is the cause of it; his self-conceit is so vast that it doesn't allow him to perceive things in any light but one that is flattering to himself. I feel sure that he thinks he is courageous, although he fights a duel with pistols loaded with wadding instead of bullets, and that he would think he was a soldier if he played in a lottery band, just as he thinks he has a handsome leg because he has fat calves, and beautiful hair because it is crisped like a negro's. After all, he is happy, and that is the essential thing. Happy people cannot be by any means so rare as they are said to be, for there are a great many people like Raymond in the world."

If it had not been so late I should have gone to see Nicette; I should have gone to win from her eyes that sweet, that tender and perhaps true feeling which I had never found in Mademoiselle Caroline's, beautiful though they were. I said, "perhaps true," for I dare not rely on anything.

When I went out I involuntarily took my way towards the Rue Caumartin; it was only at the corner of the boulevard that I stopped. It was habit that impelled me, as it impels one to do many things. It is, in fact, second nature, and it holds us long after love has ceased to do so. How many people there are who love each other no longer and who remain together by force of habit. I don't speak of those who are married; the latter cannot do otherwise. The sooner to lose this habit which could not as yet be very deeply rooted since my intimacy with Caroline had only lasted for a couple of months, I determined to go and see Madame de Marsan, with whom it recurred to me I had been a little smitten. Besides, I owed her a visit of thanks for the invitation she had so kindly sent me and by which I had not profited, thanks to my travelling companion.

The house, I believed, was in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, near the first street on the right—besides, I could inquire; rich people are always known and are easily found; it is only the honest poor that nobody knows, but then they are sought so rarely. I therefore walked towards the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, I inquired for M. de Marsan; three or four persons hastened to indicate his dwelling, to point to it with their fingers. "M. de Marsan," I reflected, "must be a very rich man! everybody knows him or wishes to appear to do so. Money is really a very delightful thing!"

His house was in truth very handsome; less elegant, less gorgeous perhaps than that of M. de Grandmaison, but I suspected that it was more in harmony with his circumstances, and for a man who knows how to calculate this advantage should outweigh the others. It was barely noon; could I see madame, I wondered. It was rather early to present one's self for the first time at a pretty woman's house, and above all, a pretty woman who was near thirty. The further these dames leave their springtime behind them the more time do they take at their toilets, which prevents them from being visible at an early hour. At fifteen they present themselves as they are; at twenty they allow themselves to be seen in a simple negligé; at twenty-five they prink for some time before appearing; at thirty they take a good deal of trouble with their toilet; at thirty-six — but that will lead us too far, let us stop at thirty-six.

The porter told me to go up one flight, the door to the left; that was Madame de Marsan's apartment, monsieur's offices were on the ground-floor. I went through several rooms and at last found a parlormaid who was not pretty enough for one to wish to stop to talk to her when on the way to her mistress. I asked for madame, gave my name, and the servant went to announce me. I only had to wait for five minutes, which is not too much in order to see a pretty woman when some rich fools, men in office and rich parvenus,

allow themselves to keep one waiting for an hour before they show their fat faces.

"You may come in, monsieur," said the maid, and she led me to her mistress' room. This prompt reception seemed to me of happy augury.

I found Madame de Marsan seated on a tête-à-tête in a pretty, gracefully decorated little room, where the softest light only was permitted to penetrate, tempered as it was with double shades and venetian shutters. I saw a piano, a harp, some songs. I had a great liking for women who were fond of music and a still greater inclination for those who could produce it, it is a recourse against idleness; a woman who does nothing thinks too much.

Madame de Marsan received me with an amiable smile in which I thought I perceived a trace of spite, which I attributed to the slight desire I had evinced in coming to see her; and this conduct, which, however, was unintentional on my part, served me better than if I had paid her assiduous court. She was piqued; she had felt sure that she had made a conquest of me, and she had not seen me again. In fact, it must have appeared very singular to her, after my oglings at the theatre and my conduct at Vauvert's. I was astonished myself, for I now found her a hundred times prettier than Caroline.

She made me no reproaches; nevertheless, I hastened to excuse myself for having failed to

respond to her invitation by telling her what had happened to me with M. Raymond. The story of our misadventures at Montmorency made Madame de Marsan laugh heartily; and this gayety eliminated the etiquette and ceremony of a first interview and facilitated a better understanding of our hearts and minds.

In order to prolong my visit I begged Madame de Marsan to sing something for me. She graciously yielded to my request and acquitted herself with a taste and skill which delighted me. She accompanied herself perfectly on the piano; she was, in fact, a musician. How she must have suffered at Vauvert's party. But I could not prolong a first call to an undue length. It is necessary to use tact in order to make one's self desired, and not to lavish one's attentions at first, above all upon women who are used to receiving homage and adulation and to being assiduously courted. Up to the present I had not hid the admiration I felt — but I resolved to be upon my guard in this respect for the future. My last adventure had renewed all my grudges against a sex which I cannot fly, but on whom I should like to inflict a small portion of the torments they lavish upon me. I then took leave of Madame de Marsan.

"Do not be so long again without coming to see us," she said to me as I left.

"No, madame, I shall often profit by your kind permission to come and see you and hear your

delightful singing — indeed, you may find that I abuse it."

"Believe me, monsieur, we shall never complain of your coming too frequently. You are fond of music, and we often have some. I go out very little, and it will be really kind of you to come and join our little parties."

This woman was immensely charming. I believe I say so every time the tinder of my heart is kindled anew by the flame of love. But what if one uses the same expressions, are not the same feelings repeated in our hearts? What she had just said to me was most amiable. She could never see me too often — it was almost a declaration. I went off in a state of mind in which hope said the most flattering things, believing myself already adored. Besides, according to what Raymond had told me, this would not be her first frailty; he had spoken to me, I believed, of three or four penchants that she had had before. But I mustn't judge Madame de Marsan by my neighbor's reports, for he was both a liar and a scandalmonger.

I would go to her house this evening — this evening, did I say, no, that would be over prompt. I had resolved not to plunge too quickly into this intrigue, but to try to learn first the character of the one who attracted me, not to allow her to know my sentiments before I was sure of her, and here I was already burning with ardor, and desirous of going to the extremest length in my new

affair. I was incorrigible, really, and I feared I should never know what perfect love was.

Not until two days had passed did I go to Madame de Marsan's. But distraction was necessary to me, not that I was still thinking of Mademoiselle Caroline. Oh, no, that wound was entirely cured; I even thought now that it had never been very deep. However, if I gave myself up to my own devices, my natural impatience would urge me towards Madame de Marsan. But had I not still Nicette to put in the breach between myself and trouble and weariness, and above all, new loves? I would go to see her, but no, it was barely two o'clock — I could not go yet, people would talk about us, and I did not wish that. I must wait until it was dark. I would go back home, and before dinner try to put my affairs into some sort of order.

I found a letter from my sister in my room. Poor Amélie, she complained that I had entirely forgotten her. In fact, it was now September and I had not been to see her. If I could only go there for two or three days— but that was impossible! When once I was there they would not let me get away. She spoke of a fine match she had found for me; sixteen years old, beautiful, virtuous, and wealthy. I confess all this was dazzling, but still it did not tempt me; perhaps in two or three years I should be ready to settle down — but we should see about that. I wished, however, to go and pass a fortnight this autumn with my

sister and her husband; besides, I must put my affairs in a little better shape, for they had become sadly disorganized through my liaison with the little flower-maker. Hang it! at the pace at which I had been going my income had been quickly dissipated. I really owed her some gratitude for leaving me in time to prevent my ruining myself. Six months of economy would enable me to pay all my debts; that meant also six months without pleasures which were too costly. Mademoiselle Caroline had proved to me that the women for whom one does the most are not those who love one the best.

It was dark and I went to see Nicette. Her shop was closed, but I perceived a light through the pane over the door. I knocked very softly; I feared to attract the attention of the neighbors. I acted like a lover who was afraid to be seen.

"Who is there?" she asked.

"It is I, it is —"

There was no need for me to mention my name, for the door was already open and I stood before her. I went into the shop, closing the door after me, and I paused to look at this young girl, alone in the midst of these flowers, these plants, which filled the little room so that there was space only for a table and a chair. The table was covered with paper, with pens and books, and a single candle illumined this place, which was redolent with the agreeable odor of flowers.

She made me seat myself beside her.

"How good of you to come and see me, monsieur, and to think of me sometimes."

"Why? do you not sometimes think of me, Nicette?"

"Always, but that is no reason why you should — it is very different with you."

"What were you doing when I came in?"

"I was writing, monsieur; I was learning my lesson."

She blushed as she told me this. I looked on the table and saw on a number of sheets of paper a name written and begun a hundred times; that name was mine. Poor Nicette!

I looked at her and she blushed still deeper and murmured, as she lowered her eyes,—

"Forgive me, monsieur, for using your name as a copy, but I thought I should like to write my benefactor's name first."

I took her hands and pressed them in my own as I answered,—

"Really, Nicette, I do not merit so much friendship, if you did but know me better."

"Oh, I know you well by all you have done for me."

"Are you happy now?"

"Yes, monsieur, I could not be more so."

The manner in which she said this, the tinge of melancholy which spread over her features, gave me room for many reflections.

"Nicette, I find you changed."

"How changed, monsieur?"

"You are paler and a little thinner."

"I am not ill, though."

"Perhaps the odor of these flowers —"

"But I have been used to that for a very long time."

"Your manners do not seem to me so cheerful, so vivacious, as on the occasion of our first meeting."

"One's not always the same, monsieur."

"However, if you have no trouble of any kind —"

"Which indeed I have not, monsieur."

"But your eyes tell me a different story. Dear Nicette, you have been crying."

"No, monsieur; and even if I had, people cry sometimes without knowing why — and without having any trouble or grief."

We said no more. I would not question her further, for I thought I knew the cause of her trouble. She would no longer meet my eyes; she evidently feared what I might read in hers. She remained thoughtful and silent. I could not talk either. Her sadness had gone to my heart; but that silence which is shared by two people has a certain charm. It was necessary that I should try to distract her, and that I myself should keep from thoughts which were too dangerous. I approached the table, I looked at the papers, the copies.

"You write very well already, Nicette."

"Middling, monsieur, it can hardly be called well yet, but I hope to do better in time."

"Are you still taking lessons?"

"No, I have no master now; he was tiresome, he did not want to give me copies which pleased me, he made me write over and over again such words as 'commencement,' 'community,' 'exactly,' and it seemed to me that one might as well learn to write 'Dorsan' as 'community,' although it isn't so long a word; that made him shout at me. So I sent him away. I can get along without him. I know also how to write in small hand."

"Let me see you do it."

"Why, monsieur, if I try to write before you I am sure my hand will tremble."

"Why should that be? Come, I want to give you a lesson. Will you let me?"

"Oh, yes, certainly."

She came and seated herself at the table, I placed my chair against hers; I passed my right arm around her to guide her hand with mine, my face touched her hair, she nestled against me, I inhaled her sweet breath and I could count the beatings of her heart. What pleasure I experienced during this lesson. Without thinking, without meaning to do so, I guided her hand to write the words, "I love thee." My hand trembled as much as the one I was trying to guide. But a tear dropped from her eyes, the pen dropped from our

hands. I don't know quite how it happened, but Nicette's pretty face was hidden on my breast, her arms twined about me, and I pressed her tenderly in mine and felt in that moment that were Madame de Marsan or any one else there I would not disengage myself from Nicette's arms.

We remained for a long time thus, and did not dream of changing our position. Nicette was happy; and I, well, I was tasting a happiness which I had not as yet experienced, a pleasure of which I had had no idea and which was untroubled by the slightest desire that could cause me to blush.

That was all very well for the present. I could not answer for the future; another kiss might prove incendiary.

Some one knocked violently at the shop door; Nicette disengaged herself from my arms; I looked uneasily at her.

"Who can it be so late as this? You told me that you had no acquaintances."

"I don't know who it can be, I am expecting nobody."

Her eyes reassured me, they could not lie. But the person knocked again and we distinguished these words,—

"Open the door! open quickly, Mamzelle Nicette, your mother is very ill and she wants to see you."

Nicette hurried to open the door; she recognized the daughter of one of Madame Jerome's

neighbors. The little girl told Nicette that her mother had had an apoplectic stroke, the result of a violent quarrel with her daughter Fanchon, and that feeling very ill she desired to see the child she had driven away so unjustly. Nicette ran, flew; in an instant she had put on her cap, taken off her apron.

"Good-by, good-by, M. Dorsan," she said to me in a trembling voice; "my mother is ill, I can think of nothing but that."

We left the shop — she took the little girl's arm; she led her along, the other could hardly keep pace with her. I soon lost sight of them.

Amiable girl, she united all the virtues! I loved her more than I had thought — more than I had ever loved before. The greatest proof that I loved her truly was that up to the present I had respected her innocence; but for all that I felt it would be as well that I should not go to see her in the evening, to be alone with her was too dangerous. If some one had not knocked at the door I did not know what would have happened.

Now I must hover around Madame de Marsan to avoid becoming too deeply attached to Nicette; I must occupy my head to calm my heart.

CHAPTER IV

A Commonplace Comedy. The Rehearsal. Almaviva and Rosine. A Scene Added to the Barber of Seville

My conduct for some days after the episode recorded in the last chapter, was prudence itself. I necessarily went to pay my court to Madame de Marsan, and in so doing evoked a good many would-be jocular commentaries from my neighbor Raymond.

On the other hand, I wisely refrained from making another visit in the evening to Nicette's house, and when I saw the gentle flower-girl, as I passed her shop in the morning, I said good-day to her without stopping. Her mourning garments apprised me of the fact that her mother's illness had had a fatal termination; but I had not yet inquired as to the details of Madame Jerome's death. I was afraid to exhibit to Nicette the sympathy I felt for her.

My friend, Madame de Marsan, I found to be an extremely engaging woman, very lively, very coquettish. I saw that she was continually surrounded with several young men who paid her the most assiduous attention, but I did not know

whether they were any more fortunate than myself. I was not sufficiently in love to be jealous; however, I was in a bad temper at seeing this swarm of adorers interpose themselves so often between her and me. Twenty times had I been tempted to betake myself from the contest, but a secret hope told me that I was preferred above all my rivals. Madame de Marsan's parties were delightful; the company was choice, the women were pretty, the men were well-bred; people were polite and refined without being affected or cold, they were cheerful without ceasing to be decent, gallant but not fast, and when they made some mischievous speech it was uttered in a tone of good fellowship which forbade offence. The music was good but not pretentious; and those at the card tables played high without exhibiting the least emotion whether they lost or won; in good society people understand how to lose money with charming grace.

October was approaching and before winter should be upon us, with its balls and dancing parties, Madame de Marsan intended to give a fête at her country house, where they were to play a comedy. For a long time I had heard them speak of this fête, for which great preparations were afoot. The choice of plays which they were to represent was long debated, and at length they had decided on the "Barbier de Seville" and "Fanchon the Vielleuse"; Madame de Marsan

absolutely insisted on my taking a part, though up to the present I had merely played in charades where nothing was spoken; but I could not well refuse to do anything she asked me, so I was to enact the part of Lindor and she that of Rosine, and I certainly had nothing to complain of in this arrangement. In the distribution of the other parts Raymond was not forgotten, being a very desirable person for a commonplace comedy. As to M. de Marsan, he did not participate in the acting. In grand fêtes husbands are useful only to furnish the money.

The day being fixed, Madame de Marsan left for her country place, where all those who were to take part in the theatricals were to meet a few days before the great occasion that they might have time to rehearse and learn their parts. Raymond, who had left me in peace for some time, now came to bother me every morning to hear him repeat the words of his part as Bartholo; and as he was also to play that of the Abbé de Lattaignant in "Fanchon," he wanted me to teach him the airs of the songs he was to sing; for although he prided himself on being quite a musician, it took him a fortnight to get the tune of a couplet from a vaudeville into his head, although he always had the "Clef du Caveau" in his pocket.

"Instead of this 'Fanchon,' which is interminable," remarked my neighbor to me invariably of a morning, "it would have been much better to

play a new little piece. I would have written one; in fact, I have some already done which do charmingly for society plays."

"Why don't you propose it?"

"Pshaw! there is that Madame Saint-Marc, Madame de Marsan's friend, who is quite set on our playing 'Fanchon' because she imagines that she will look very pretty as a little girl; and that tall, thin creature is going to take the character of Sainte-Luce! Well, let them go it, if that will suit them! for my part I should be much better as the soldier than as the priest; the part suits my height, my carriage, better. But I'll do with a good will whatever will suit them best; I'll sacrifice myself. I hope, moreover, that if we have time before the fête we shall play my little opera of the 'Lovers protected by Venus.' There are but three acts — all very short — but it's very effective. Listen, this is the first —"

"I'm studying my part as Lindor."

"That's all the same, you can just judge the effect. The stage represents a magnificent country place, where they are preparing for the wedding of the lovers. The princess begins thus,—

> Prince, in this spot which shall our nuptials see,
> I feel my happiness — I feel my love for thee —"

I listened no further to it, and although the fête was not to take place for ten days to come, I got rid of Raymond by starting into the country to Madame de Marsan's, where I was not sorry to

arrive before the rest of the company. There I hoped to find a more favorable opportunity than any I had had as yet to prosecute my acquaintance with Madame de Marsan, and what is so precious as the opportunity of doing what one wishes. It is necessary only to seize it.

This time I took care to acquire proper information as to the whereabouts of Madame de Marsan's country house, where in due time I arrived without any mistake. It was almost a little château. The situation was charming, the neighborhood delightful, the grounds seemed to be well kept and spacious, the apartments elegant, and so well distributed that a numerous party could be comfortably entertained; but I could look at everything later on, for I did not wish to loiter in presenting my compliments to the mistress of the house.

"Madame is alone," said the chambermaid to me, "None of the company has yet arrived."

I had hoped this would be the case.

"And where is M. de Marsan?"

"Oh, monsieur does not come till the evening before or on the day of the fête — he never takes part in those things."

I could not have chosen my time better, and I hastened to go and surprise my hostess. The welcome which I received proved that she was flattered by my haste.

"It's extremely kind of you to be the first to

come," she said; "we can rehearse together a scene from the 'Barbier,' for you know our parts are lengthy, and I have not a good memory."

"I will do anything that pleases you, madame."

"Come, first of all, and look at our theatre. I'm sure you expect to find a little poky place, where one's head almost touches the flies and where the houses in the scenery are smaller than the actors. Come, monsieur, I wish that the sight of our stage should rouse your emulation."

Madame de Marsan laughingly led me to the gardens; the theatre stood in the midst of them. It was large, commodious, and very well laid out. The auditorium was elegantly decorated, and would hold three hundred persons.

"Well, monsieur, what do you think of our playhouse?"

"That it would shame many provincial theatres."

"And we also flatter ourselves that our acting is not like that in the small towns — we stop at nothing, comedy, vaudeville, comic operas — we play everything except tragedies."

"And why that exception?"

"You may readily imagine that in the best amateur troup at least half of the members wish for nothing better than to laugh and to provoke laughter, which in our theatre is never forbidden, but we have sometimes noticed that these people laugh a good deal more at tragedies than at any-

thing else; and as we could not in that case accept laughter in place of applause, we now play nothing but what is cheerful, and then when we make our audience laugh we are sure that it is a mark of approbation. You see, there is always a way of keeping one's self-respect. At our last performance we had a most complete success. We gave 'Pourceaugnac' most completely staged, nothing was forgotten. I believe we bought up all the syringes in Montmorency! But how delightful it all was; it made a great stir, they spoke of it in Paris, and there was even an article about it in the papers. You can understand that it is a matter of honor to sustain our reputation."

I promised Madame de Marsan to do my best to render myself worthy of appearing on her stage, and we left the theatre to go and walk about the gardens. The grounds might almost have been designated a park, one could easily have lost one's self there, and I foresaw no little enjoyment in its sylvan haunts. There was a little wood, a grotto, a bridge which lacked nothing but water running beneath it; there were shrubberies, very shady and very thick, covered paths, grass that was always green, some pretty little hills, an underground path, a rock, a cascade, and everything delightful that one can put into a garden. It was a charming spot, where dulness could never enter — at least so it seemed to me.

Madame de Marsan assigned to me a pretty

chamber, from whence there was a fine view of the surrounding country. This apartment would have pleased me very much had it not been so distant from her own. For this I reproached her, but she answered me jokingly. Patience, my turn would come perhaps.

It was necessary that I should apply myself to the task of learning my part, for in the evening Madame de Marsan wished that we should rehearse some scenes, and she left me to study. In the country, etiquette and ceremony are cast aside.

"Here," she said to me, "everyone does as he pleases, people get up when they wish, go out walking, rest, leave and return, according to their own desires; provided they are prompt at meal times and at the hours fixed for rehearsal, they are otherwise entirely their own masters."

I promised to conform to these established rules, and I plunged into the shrubbery, there to study the rôle of Almaviva. But the thought that I was alone in this house with Madame de Marsan — for of course the servants and workmen did not count — incessantly distracted me. What! I was near a pretty woman who allowed me to pay my court to her without exhibiting any displeasure, who even, to my partial eye, appeared more than interested, and I had not yet ventured to "put it to the touch and win or lose it all." I saw very well, however, that I had to do with a great coquette, who perhaps feigned to be sensible of my

homage in order to longer chain me to the wheels of her chariot.

I was counting on dining tête-à-tête with Madame de Marsan, but a tiresome neighbor came to pay her a visit and remained to dinner with us. I had a suspicion that the presence of this gentleman bored her as much as it did me; but she was obliged, perforce, to appear very pleased to see him. Happily, during dinner our neighbor talked for the three of us; we were thus at liberty to pursue our thoughts without fear of the conversation drooping.

The old gentleman, who was possessed of his full share of the garrulity and egotism of old age, hardly gave himself time to take breath; he detailed his property to us from the entrance to his courtyard up to the wall which enclosed his garden. He took pains to inform us exactly how many acres of land he had, what his garden stuff brought him in, how many feet of timber he had planted or cut, the number of his fowls, the quantity of eggs he got from them each week, how much produce he sold at the market and how much he got for it, and a thousand other trifles no less entertaining and interesting to us; but while he was speaking, my eyes were holding conversation of another sort with Madame de Marsan. The neighbor, deep in his crops and his profits, did not perceive this, and I acknowledged to myself that extremely chatty people are sometimes very accom-

modating. Towards half-past seven the neighbor began to think of returning home to see how his hens had laid during the day. He departed and I remained alone with Madame de Marsan. We were going to take a turn in the garden, the verdure, the shade, the silence, all lent themselves to dreamy thoughts of love, and I wished to speak on the same theme, but my coquettish companion would answer me only according to her part as Rosine. I went on without listening to her and then she scolded me.

"That's not it, monsieur," she said to me, "you haven't studied it; you don't know a word of your part."

"But, madame, this is not a question of the comedy."

"What, monsieur, did we not come here to rehearse it?"

"We have plenty of time."

"Not at all; my memory is very bad."

"You won't listen to me, then?"

"On the contrary, you don't answer me; you don't follow your cues."

"For a long time past you have known that I love you, adore you."

"I know all that is in your part, but you ought to say it to me in a different manner."

"I see, madame, it gives you pleasure to tease me."

"How spitefully, how warmly you said that —

that's the way, I assure you; you are going to do it very well indeed."

What a woman! there was no way of making her give a direct answer to what interested me. We went back to the drawing-room; I was in a bad temper. I repeated my part off-hand, but I said my words so badly that Madame de Marsan made fun of me at every moment. I left her and went to bed, having almost made up my mind to leave the house. Still I stayed, though I did anything but bless these women. The only one who was perfect, the only one who alone showed any real love for me, was precisely the one who could be neither my wife nor my mistress.

The next day I decided to learn my lines; this complaisance on my part would perhaps bring its own reward. Since I was to act I did not wish to appear more awkward than anyone else, so I set to studying Count Almaviva and plunged into the gardens with my copy of the "Barbier de Seville" in my hand. I had the faculty of quickly committing to memory anything I pleased; in less than four hours I should be able to act the entire piece. I said nothing of this at dinner time, for I wished to surprise Madame de Marsan, who laughingly asked me if I knew my lines better than I had done on the previous evening.

After dinner we remained in the drawing-room, she did not wish to go to the garden to rehearse —it was too cool there, she said. Was that really

the reason? She took her book, I had no need of mine for I was letter perfect, and we rehearsed our scenes. I put a vivacity, a warmth into my part which made her as mute as I had been the evening before. It was my turn to scold her now, for I was obliged to correct her and to give her the lead; she followed all my instructions, allowed me to take her hand, to press it, to kiss it. I threw myself at her feet,—

"What!" she exclaimed uneasily, "is that all in the play?"

"Yes, madame, it is every bit of it there," and I was about to profit by my position, her uneasiness and all the advantages which my part as her lover allowed me to make her a declaration of my real passion, when the sound of steps was heard without, the door of the drawing-room opened, and Raymond appeared — that confounded man! surely, he was born only to bring discomfiture upon me.

Seeing me at Madame de Marsan's feet, he quickly pulled his part out of his pocket and began to shout with all his might,—

"'Curses on that desperado! that scoundrelly shark of a Figaro! one can't leave his house for a moment but on his return he—' Madame, I have the honor of offering my respects; you see I am punctual. Good-evening, my dear Dorsan; why did you go off without me yesterday? I would have accompanied you. Well, as you see,

I know my part already. I have a splendid memory. With the prompter to fall back upon I shall be all right."

Madame de Marsan thanked Raymond for his promptitude, and complimented him upon his facility. Her emotion had passed; we began to rehearse again, and she was entirely taken up with her part. So my hopes vanished again, owing to that confounded Raymond. The next day all the members of the theatrical company arrived; there was not a moment to be devoted to a tête-à-tête, we were rehearsing from morning till night; and when they were rehearsing "Fanchon," in which play Madame de Marsan did not take a part, she had so many orders to give for the costumes and all the details of her fête, that it was impossible for me to obtain a moment's conversation with her. Alas, but for Raymond I should have been the happiest of men — for the time being — I was sure of it. The favorable moment had arrived, and in order to obtain any return of one's love from a hardhearted woman it's necessary to snatch such moments before they escape; one may recur to them with a tender woman, but never with a coquette.

Raymond was enchanted with the importance of his position. He had need of all his wits, for in addition to the two parts he had to learn, which was no trifle for him, Madame de Marsan had charged him with the superintendence of part of

the decorations and of the orchestra; and, what is more, as the young lady who played Fanchon was an intimate friend, and as the date of the play was that of her name day also, the hostess begged Raymond to compose a little scene relating to this circumstance, which they could add to the vaudeville that was to be played as an afterpiece. Raymond worked with impetuous ardor at this little impromptu piece. In the morning, as soon as I was awake, he came to tell me what he had done. He had the beginning of several verses, but he could finish none of them, and he begged me to complete them for him, assuring me that I might call on him when I had a like task to perform.

After breakfast he ran to the theatre, where he turned everything upside down, examined the decorations and regretted that he had not had time to make some machinery for his scene, because he would have liked to put a fairy in it; but in default of demons, which Madame de Marsan would not hear of because of the fire, and of nymphs, which are not to be obtained in the country, Raymond was bound to cause a crown to descend upon Fanchon's head, and he ordered the gardener, who had charge of the scenery, to make a fine one and to attach it to a cord on the day of representation; this cord was to be hung from the centre of the flies. My neighbor's latest and most brilliant idea was to have two little cupids, who, instead of coming from a cloud, were to issue from

the prompter's den, which would, he averred, produce an even finer effect, and were to present bouquets to the principal actors in the piece.

The great day was drawing near, and the whole energy of the company was expended in rehearsing; each one making it a point of honor to surpass all the rest. Staging a play gives an immense amount of occupation to an amateur company; a good deal of trouble, a good deal of pains must be expended in arranging the numerous details; but as a recompense for this how much pleasure do they experience when the scene of their efforts resounds with hearty applause — and of this last amateurs can be sure, even if the play go badly.

We all knew our lines except Raymond, who murdered Bartholo and could not remember one of Lattaignant's couplets. The ladies scolded him, but his answer was invariable the same,—

"Oh, you'll see; with the prompter's aid, I shall do well enough."

The evening before the performance we had a general rehearsal in the theatre, with footlights, etc. Raymond had not been seen since the morning; at six o'clock, the time fixed for the rehearsal, he had not appeared and we waited for him in vain. We looked all over the house, in the garden, in the wood, everybody joined in the search; the footmen were sent into the neighborhood and ordered to bring M. Raymond back, dead or alive. We could not begin without him, and what

threw everybody into despair was the fact that we had nobody to replace him; for how could anyone learn two such long parts by the evening of the next day. The ladies were ready to cry with vexation when, just as eight was striking, the truant Raymond arrived, perspiring and covered with dust, and holding by the hand two tiny urchins between five and six years old, with very fat red cheeks, with much bedaubed faces, and very dirty and muddy little blouses.

"Where have you been?" was the universal exclamation; the ladies would have liked him to have a sound drubbing.

"That's it," demurred Raymond, "scold me as hard as you can when I've given myself a devil of a lot of trouble to find two cupids for you. I've been hunting all over the neighborhood ever since morning. I'm sure I've walked more than thirty miles; but everywhere I could find only wide-mouthed, squint-eyed, and flat-nosed faces. In fact, I did not get what I wanted till I reached Saint-Denis; but see how fresh and plump they are! they'll make two good cupids, won't they?"

The sight of the two small boys, whom Raymond had coaxed on their way by purchasing grape jam for them, with which they had smeared themselves up to the eyebrows, quickly calmed the anger of the company.

"And whose children are they?" asked Madame de Marsan.

"Their mother is a milkwoman at Saint-Denis, and she is delighted to have her children act as cupids. She's coming tomorrow to see them play; I've promised her a place behind the curtain at the back. Now have these children cleaned up a bit, and you'll see how nice they are."

The young lady who was to play Fanchon could not understand what they needed cupids for, being quite unaware that they were arranging a surprise for her. Madame de Marsan tried to repair Raymond's indiscretion and the rehearsal began, lasting until one o'clock in the morning; then everybody went to bed, greatly fatigued but longing for the next day. Raymond confided his two urchins to the housekeeper, begging her to have them washed and to get them up in good time in the morning that he might teach them what they had to do.

The great day dawned, the ladies rose very early; presumably the thought of their toilets had prevented their sleeping. The men, who are occasionally as particular about this item as the women, were also all of them more occupied with their costumes than with their parts. I alone was not so deeply absorbed in the events of the evening, because my love for Madame de Marsan, irritated as it has been for some time past by all sorts of obstacles, partially excluded from my mind such an indifferent matter as a comedy. By far the busiest person in the whole house was Raymond;

from break of day he was up and about. His first care was to look after his little peasants, whom he was trying to imbue with a little grace and some of that infantile abandon so necessary for the part he was trying to teach them. The babies opened their eyes wide and leaped clumsily about when he told them to dance, fell awkwardly to the ground every time he tried to make them stand on one leg, and wept bitter tears when he desired them to smile. My neighbor led them to the gardener, who was transformed into a general man for the stage, and endeavored to instruct him also. The gardener was a stupid, heavy fellow, who did not know how to do anything, but who wanted to appear as if he understood everything that was said to him.

"My good fellow," said Raymond to this worthy, "do you know what you have to do this evening?"

"Aye, monsieur."

"First of all the crown of flowers —"

"Aye, monsieur."

"— must be lowered on to Fanchon's head."

"Fanchon's head — aye, monsieur."

"You will attach it, the crown, I mean, by a cord to the ceiling. Do you know if there is a cord there?"

"Aye, monsieur, one they used for the gentleman with the squirts in the last play we had — mighty funny it was too. M. Pourceau — Pour-

ceau — I can't think of the name, but he wouldn't take physic before everybody."

"That's enough, my man, that's enough. Well, the crown being attached, you will make a dozen very fresh bouquets, have them as pretty as possible, and give them to these children, who will be dressed as cupids."

"Oh, aye, I knows 'em, they be Madeline's brats."

"Pay attention to what I am saying."

"Aye, monsieur."

"When you've given them the bouquets you'll take them to the prompter's den."

"Aye, monsieur, to the prompter's den, I knows what you mean."

"They will come on the stage from there when I clap my hands twice."

"Aye, monsieur, clap your hands twice —"

"Don't forget anything, my good fellow!"

"No, monsieur, you needn't be a bit uneasy, I'm used to this sort o' thing."

Later, Raymond went to a costumer's with his two children, but he could not get flesh-colored tights for them because such things are seldom worn in society, and was obliged to content himself with the purchase of two small pairs of nankeen trousers, above which the boys were to wear white tunics; and when to those garments were added the belts, the fillets over their eyes, the bows and the quivers, the make-up was complete. Having

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ordered a hairdresser to come express from Montmorency to curl the little cupids' hair, Raymond gave his sole attention to trying to learn the parts he himself was to take in the evening.

A numerous and brilliant company had arrived from Paris and were dispersed about the house and gardens. Madame de Marsan, despite the attention she was compelled to give to theatrical matters, did the honors of her house with much grace and good breeding.

M. de Marsan arrived only a few minutes before dinner on the day of the fête; but some business on 'Change had kept him in Paris. Probably knowing that his wife was going to spend a great deal of money he thought he must get some in proportion, in order to maintain the equilibrium of his exchequer.

In the evening many of the dwellers in the neighborhood, the cream of the local society, who had received tickets of invitation to the play, hastened with delight to form part of the audience. In this way the whole seating capacity of the theatre was taken up, with the exception of a couple of rows of back seats, which were occupied by some of the villagers. A large audience is a great delight in amateur theatricals, for even amateurs do not find much inspiration playing to empty benches.

It was time to begin. Our little playhouse was filled with spectators. Raymond was incessantly

looking through a hole in the curtain to see where the ladies were placed whom he wished to ogle as he declaimed his part.

"Let's begin!" was the cry of those who were ready, which every one was not. Raymond had not even finished dressing, and as he assumed each garment he again went to look through the hole in the curtain, his pot of rouge in one hand and his part in the other.

"Come, why don't you make haste?" they shouted to him from all sides as they pushed him towards his dressing-room, and then ran towards that of Madame de Marsan to find out if Rosine was ready. The four amateurs who composed the orchestra had already twice played the overture to "Richard Cœur-de-Leon," which served as the overture to the "Barbier de Seville," and were about to play it for the third time — because they had not another before them — the public began to get impatient, and slight murmurs were heard. But we were ready at length, and Raymond, who was the scene-shifter, raised the curtain.

I knew my lines perfectly; the feeling I experienced for Madame de Marsan, who looked prettier than ever to me in the costume of Rosine, gave me the warmth and earnestness requisite to represent a lover such as Almaviva.

The young man who played Figaro not only looked his part to perfection, but he acted it with vivacious audacity. The whole company put an

amount of animation into their work which made each scene very effective, and the audience was delighted. At the moment when Bartholo should appear at the window with Rosine, Raymond, in trying to raise the jalousy, drew it so suddenly that it fell on the lamps which served as footlights; happily the sight of Madame de Marsan, who looked most charming in her Spanish costume, caused Raymond's awkwardness to be forgotten. The first act passed off well; in the second Raymond's memory had begun to fail him, and he was incapable of uttering a word without the help of the prompter, near whose den he carefully kept, looking at the hole and turning his ear in that direction, often making that unlucky wight repeat what he ought to say three times over, apostrophizing him when he did not prompt, and telling him to hold his tongue when he did and when Raymond thought he knew his speech. In this way he made a Cassandra of Bartholo, but a public such as ours could not but be indulgent; besides, the other parts were all well played; we put some warmth into our scenes, we entered into the spirit of our characters. We were applauded to the echo, and Raymond appropriated to himself no small share of the commendation, while the actors consigned him to the devil every time he took part in a scene. The third act began, Raymond opened the scene. He advanced and stationed himself as near as possible to the prompter.

"What a temper! what a temper. (To the prompter: Why don't you prompt?) She looks as though she were pacified—now, can anybody tell me (No, don't prompt me), can anybody tell me what the devil got into her—to—to (Come, prompt me, can't you) to no longer wish (Hey! I don't hear you) to no longer wish to take lessons from Dom Basile (You needn't prompt me here) She must know that he is interested in my marriage. Does everything—for everybody—does—does—(Hey what ought I to say now? Devil take it, you don't know how to prompt correctly)."

The public laughed heartily at our Bartholo, but Raymond rubbed his hands with an amazingly self-satisfied air very time he came into the wings, exclaiming,—

"How pleased they are! how much amused! they've never laughed so heartily before."

At length the piece ended in spite of the stammering Raymond, whose best efforts were evidently given to prevent just this very thing; Rosine's grace, Figaro's dash, and lastly, for we must render justice where it is due, the warmth, the feeling, the ardor and animation with which I played Almaviva achieved the complete success of the piece,—I received a brilliant ovation and I read in Madame de Marsan's eyes the pleasure which my triumph had given her.

The "Barbier" ended, they hastened to present

"Fanchon"; the whole cast of the "Barbier" played also in the after-piece, with the exception of Madame de Marsan and myself, and this circumstance gave us all time to change our costumes. Our dressing-rooms opened into the gardens, those of the ladies being separated from those of the gentlemen only by a grove of linden trees.

After resuming my ordinary dress I went into the garden to get a little air. The second piece had commenced for some time and everybody was on the stage or in the theatre; solitude reigned in the gardens and a calm which was refreshing after the noise we had just been making. I was not sorry to walk about for a few moments, but in crossing the linden grove I saw a lady issue from one of the dressing-rooms opposite. I stopped — it was Madame de Marsan — it was my Rosine; the recognition was mutual, and she came towards me.

"And whither goes Count Almaviva?"

"I was going to enjoy the coolness of the shrubbery for a few moments, something was lacking, however; how could Almaviva be happy without his Rosine?"

"Rosine is not sure that she ought to accompany him."

"What, after consenting to allow yourself to be abducted?"

"Well, yes; it would be very ungracious in me to pretend to be hard-hearted now; but remem-

ber you have sworn to be faithful, to love me always, and to love none but me."

"Willingly do I swear it to you again; I should like to repeat it to you continually."

"But where are you taking me? It seems to me that we are some distance from the theatre. And why take the shadiest paths? Why bury ourselves in this shrubbery? It is too dark to see anything."

"My dear Rosine, you surely are not timid when I am with you?"

"My dear Lindor, I confess I am rather so."

"Have you not trusted yourself entirely to me."

"I am afraid I have not been wise in so doing. Come come, why are you kissing me thus — that was not in the piece."

"Would you refuse a kiss to a lover who is to be your husband."

"Have done, Lindor — Dorsan — that was all very well in the scene —"

"Dearest Rosine, is it not quite natural that I should wish to kiss my bride?"

But we had both entered too thoroughly into our characters for Madame de Marsan to play a conventional part now, and her head sunk on my breast as I enfolded her in my arms, kissed her, and told her of my love, even as Almaviva had breathed his to Rosine. It was wrong, I know, this little scene which we added to the "Barbier de Seville" and which the public did not see, and

we played it so well that we were standing there lost to all the world, the fact that we were together and alone sufficing for our happiness, when an unforeseen event suddenly — but to explain this we must return to the theatre.

"Fanchon" had been played more than badly; many of the actors, not knowing their parts, had skipped several scenes, and Raymond had done the same with his couplets; the fate of the piece had been very quickly settled. Nobody had remarked either Madame de Marsan's absence or my own; the actors thinking us among the audience; the spectators thinking us in the wings.

The vaudeville being finished, Raymond began his little scene in honor of the lady who had played "Fanchon" and whose fête they were celebrating. Each sang his couplet, Raymond called me and Madame de Marsan also, that we might sing ours. Unable to find us and aware that his denouement was approaching, he ran into the wing to snatch the cord to which was attached the crown for Fanchon's head, he took it and by the resistance he encountered felt sure that the gardener had not forgotten to attach the crown.

The fateful moment arrived, the orchestra played. "What grace, what majesty." It was at this point that the crown was to descend. Raymond loosened the cord — a sudden murmur was heard and developed into shouts of laughter which came from all parts of the theatre.

"Stop it, stop it," shouted those on the stage. Raymond thrust his head out from the wings to see the tableau, and instead of a crown of flowers perceived a huge syringe which he had caused to descend on Fanchon's head.

The tumult was at its height; they were shrieking with laughter in the theatre, on the stage they were furiously angry at Raymond's blunder. The young lady who played Fanchon was obliged to push the syringe from her forehead with her hand. Raymond released the cord and came running on to the stage exclaiming,—

"That wasn't my fault! it's Pourceaugnac's syringe which that idiot of a gardener has forgotten to take down; that should have been a crown, but we'll repair all that. Come in, cupids!"

He got ready to give the signal, the orchestra played the air of "Zephir" from "Psyche," everyone waited impatiently for what was going to happen, and Raymond clapped his hands, saying,—

"Come, my cupids, come then," but no one came in answer to his call.

The public, tired of waiting for nothing, prepared to leave the theatre, and the actors abandoned the stage; in vain Raymond tried to keep everyone by shouting,—

"They're coming, they're going to appear, they're having their eyes bandaged."

Nobody listened to him, and Raymond, who was furious, ardently desired to find his cupids;

he threw himself into the prompter's den, looked under the stage, in all the corners of the theatre, but nowhere could he discover his imps.

The two little boys had been dressed and ready two hours before the moment for them to appear. The gardener, confused by all the orders he had received, had entirely forgotten the crown, but he had made some bouquets and given them to the children and had led them to the prompter's den bidding them,—

"Stay there; and go on the stage when they call you."

The children waited quietly enough for half an hour; but at the end of that time they began to be tired and thought they were forgotten; and as they could amuse themselves a good deal better in the garden than under the stage they left their bouquets there and ran to play outside. As they ran along they came near the house again and seeing in a brilliantly lighted room on the ground-floor a sideboard covered with a thousand delicacies, of which the sight alone made them open their mouths and put out their tongues, they stopped, they sighed, they pushed closer, they looked behind them with that instinct so natural to man when he is about to do anything wrong. There was nobody there; all the servants had left the house.

"Oh, brother?" said the smaller one, "what good things; we've never seen any like them before."

"See Fanfan, that thing is made of sugar."

"Say, now, Jean, wouldn't it be nice if we could have some of it?"

"Wait, do you see these cakes?"

"There's nobody here, let's grab some."

"Yes, let's grab some."

They easily climbed over the low sill of a window on the groundfloor; they ran to the sideboard, they stuffed their mouths full, they made aprons of their tunics and filled them with fruits, with meats, and cakes; they lapped up the cream they could not carry away, stuck their fingers in the pots of jam, and went at last to take refuge in the attics that they might consume their spoils at their leisure. While the little peasants were regaling themselves, Raymond was taking no end of trouble to find his cupids; he had fruitlessly looked all over the theatre, and on leaving it he met M. de Marsan who was looking for his wife, as the company was astonished at not seeing her.

"Have you found them?" asked Raymond.

"I don't know where she can be; everybody's asking for her; ordinarily I have no need of taking any trouble in these affairs."

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of my wife, who is not here to do the honors of the fête."

"Why, deuce take it! Madame de Marsan can't be lost, she'll appear presently, but my two cupids make me quite uneasy, for I must return

them to their mother, who is by no means a Venus, and who will probably break one of her pitchers over my head if her brats aren't found."

M. de Marsan followed Raymond, rather to look for his wife than to discover the two small fugitives. They went over a part of the gardens and then M. de Marsan wanted to go back to the company, feeling assured that his wife would be there by this time; but Raymond insisted on his staying, saying that he was responsible for the cupids since they were lost on his premises. They drew near the swing, in the proximity of which was the shrubbery where Madame de Marsan and I were standing.

"There they are," said Raymond, "I heard the swing moving. I was sure my rascals had run off to play."

They were beside the swing, but saw nothing.

"You see, there's nobody here," said M. de Marsan.

"That's singular," answered Raymond, "for I still hear something. Why, it's on this side, among the shrubbery, what the devil are the boys doing there?"

M. de Marsan advanced, Raymond followed, and we, who had heard nothing of all this, stood petrified in the bright moonlight.

"It's Almaviva and Rosine," said Raymond, stepping back. M. de Marsan alone preserved his presence of mind.

"Madame," said he, addressing his wife as peaceably as though he had not found her with another man's arm around her and another man's kisses on her lips, "the company is asking for you; you are needed to entertain your guests. You must try to make your pleasures conform to your duties."

As he finished these words he tranquilly walked off towards the house; Madame de Marsan had vanished, Raymond was motionless. I pushed rudely by him, got out of the shrubbery, in a moment had reached the gate of the courtyard and was soon on the road to Paris, which I reached at two o'clock in the morning.

CHAPTER V

Whither Will it Lead. My Star Pursues Me. Provincial Life.

The regrettable incident in the shrubbery on the evening of the play, when I was discovered embracing M. de Marsan's wife, by that gentleman himself and my neighbor Raymond, had made it quite impossible that I should return to Madame de Marsan's house or that I should meet her again in society. It was therefore necessary that our intimacy should be clandestine, that I should cover it with a veil of secrecy. With many women this would only have added to the charm; secrecy usually lends a peculiar glamour to an affair of this nature, but I feared that with Madame de Marsan — who liked to live in an atmosphere of adulation, surrounded by admirers — the impossibility of feeding her vanity by leading me as a willing captive at her chariot wheel would promptly cool her love.

If we did not meet at her house privately, it was out of respect for the proprieties, for Raymond having been a witness of the catastrophe, I felt sure that the adventure had become common property.

What surprised me was that I had not seen him since that memorable evening. A week had now passed and I had not even met him; no doubt he was afraid that I was angry. It almost seemed as though he must hide when he heard me; for, living on the same landing and both of us going out several times a day, ordinarily not more than two days passed without our seeing each other. A correspondence was established between myself and Madame de Marsan; we made appointments with each other, we went together into the country, to the play, where we sat in a private box; and I enjoyed her company still more because we met only when we could be alone, untroubled by the swarm of young men who hovered incessantly around her and whose presence had been anything but agreeable to me. When we were by ourselves she could not show so much coquetry nor amuse herself by tormenting me. I was therefore not at all sorry upon my own account that we were obliged to meet in this way; but I could well imagine that it was not the same on her part.

Our correspondence had already begun to lag, our meetings were less frequent, she incessantly found obstacles in the way of being with me — it was a gathering, a ball, a fête to which she was absolutely obliged to go. I did not place much faith in these excuses, because I knew that her husband allowed her to do exactly as she pleased. If she refused to make an appointment with me

it was because she preferred to shine at a ball or a concert, to make other conquests, and to surround herself with admirers and flatterers, to the simple pleasure of a walk with me. The inference that I drew from all this was very simple; Madame de Marsan did not love me and had never loved me. She had singled me out merely from caprice, had flattered my hopes through pure coquetry, had yielded to the impulse of a moment, and was dropping me because the whole thing bored her.

One morning, on opening my door suddenly, I saw Raymond, who was going down the staircase; I caught him by the tail of his coat.

"By Jove! neighbor Raymond, I thought you were dead."

"Good morning, my dear fellow; as a matter of fact, I haven't seen you since the 'Barbier de Seville.'"

"Yes, quite so, and I was counting on you to learn how the fête ended."

"But you must have known from—"

"From whom?"

"You understand whom I mean very well; to tell you the truth I was afraid that you were angry with me."

"And why should I be angry with you?"

"Because I brought the husband into the shrubbery."

"It was you who brought him there, was it?"

"That is to say — it was me and it wasn't me. He was looking for his wife and I was looking for the cupids, who at that moment were preparing for a fit of indigestion in the attic. The little rascals almost crammed themselves to death, and their mother declared it was my fault and wanted to scratch my eyes out; but to come back to your adventure, if you had confided to me your connection with Madame de Marsan all that wouldn't have happened. I should have diverted the husband from the idea of looking for his wife; but, as I am constantly telling you, you never tell me anything, which causes numberless unpleasant surprises. In fact, because of you I no longer go to M. de Marsan's."

"And how is that?"

"How is that?—it is quite simple. The wife, who knows what I saw, looks askance at me; the husband also is peculiar. I wanted to try and put a good face on the affair. This was, however, a difficult matter to compass, because although it was evening, the moon shone very bright. But then a man who has his wits about him can manage to make the best of things."

"Well, go on."

"Well, when you had gone I first of all wanted to pick Madame de Marsan up, because I thought she had fainted, but just as I was going towards her with some smelling salts she got herself up, threw my smelling salts in my face and ran off and

shut herself in her room. When I saw that I said, 'I must go and find the husband and throw dust in his eyes.' I went back to the drawing-room and signed to M. de Marsan to come and speak to me. At first he wouldn't leave the table where he was playing at écarté, but at length he came. I led him to a corner and there I said to him,—'Monsieur, one must not believe all that one sees, especially in the moonlight, for the moon has the quality of changing objects and that deceives one; the scene which they were rehearsing in the shrubbery was of my invention and should have been played at the end of the "Barbier," it's a love scene. In the love scenes he has to be very close to her, he has to go on his knees and take her hands, put his arm around her waist; he has to do more than that, he has to place her head upon his breast and to kiss her, this makes the scene more realistic.' I hope that showed a good deal of tact on my part."

"It was very tactful, and what did M. de Marsan answer?"

"He hardly allowed me to finish. He said to me, in a very dry tone,—'Be kind enough to refrain from boring me with your stupidity, and don't open your mouth again on that subject,' thereupon he turned on his heel. By Jove! I must confess that I thought that too much of a good thing. A husband to whom I wished to restore the matrimonial prism, and he received me like a dog in

a game of skittles; as you may imagine, I didn't feel at all flattered. However, to make an end of it, right on the heels of this came the milkwoman with her two little boys, who were purple in the face, and whom they had found in the attic; and that insolent peasant made the most infamous accusations against me, and threatened me that if they choked her husband would call me before a justice of the peace. As if that was my fault. I told them to act as cupids and not to stuff themselves to death. By Jove! when I heard that I got my hat and, taking advantage of Figaro's offer of a seat in his carriage, for he was returning to Paris, I left the fête, vowing never again to compose anachronistic plays for peasants."

When he had finished his story my neighbor left me. I don't know why, but, in spite of the assurance I had given him that I bore him no resentment in regard to a certain adventure, it seemed to me that he maintained an air of restraint which was quite contrary to his customary manner. Then he left me of his own accord, when usually I had some trouble in getting rid of him. I sought in vain the reason for this conduct, which was not at all natural to Raymond; little matter was it to me, however, what idea he had got into his head, it surprised me more than it interested me.

Something else astonished me still further and gave me a great deal more uneasiness, and this was the fact that for a long time past I had received

no more bouquets from Nicette. I had thought at first that her mother's death had occupied her during the first few days, but this event was now more than six weeks' old, and I had not yet found anything at my door. I had become so accustomed to this token of her remembrance that each evening as I came in I hastily put my hand to the keyhole, but I never found anything there, and I said sadly to myself,—"She also has forgotten me." I might have reproached her for this; but I did not wish that she should do by way of duty that which I had believed she did only because it pleased her to do so. For a long time I had not seen her; in the morning I had woke up too late, in the evening I usually accompanied some friends to those social gatherings to which the approach of winter had given birth, and where I should be likely to meet Madame de Marsan. Nor did I wish to compromise Nicette by visiting her in the evening. However, my interviews with Madame de Marsan became rarer every day, nor were they by any means so cheerful as formerly; she now only sought a reason for breaking entirely with me, and I would not furnish her with one out of sheer contradictoriness.

For some days we had not seen each other, but upon this day we were to dine together; she had accepted my invitation almost as a favor. We were to dine at the Cadran-Bleu; the sight of the Meridien, which was opposite, recalled to me the

much more cheerful repast that I had had there with Mademoiselle Agathe, and I said to myself that the grisette who deceives one frankly is much better fun than the fine lady who keeps one dangling at her heels without caring a particle about one. The dinner was very dull despite my efforts to prolong it; at seven o'clock we had nothing more to say to each other. I proposed that we should go to the play, but she could not think of one that she cared to see; it was unseasonable for walking and I did not know what to propose to her nor how to amuse her, in fact she complained of indigestion, headache, blues; she decided to go home and go to bed early, and I warmly approved this idea, which was a great relief to both of us. We therefore left the restaurant and I wanted to take a carriage, according to my usual custom; but on this occasion she preferred to go on foot, thinking that the walk in the fresh air would do her good. It was dark and we were not afraid of meeting anyone whom we did not wish to see; we walked along like a couple who had been married for twenty years — exchanging words at long intervals. We were in the Rue Saint-Honoré and were about to pass Nicette's shop, but it would be shut and I was not sorry for that; but as we drew nearer I saw that the shop was still open, for some of the plants had not yet been taken in. There was no way of drawing back; besides what motive was there for doing so, was I not at liberty

to walk with whom I chose? Yes, but then I didn't want her to see me.

But we had reached the shop and Nicette was at the door; she saw me, and by some strange freak Madame de Marsan wanted to stop and examine the flowers.

"Here is a charming orange-tree," she said to me, "for a long time I have wanted one in my boudoir. I like that one very much, don't you think it's pretty?"

"Yes, madame, yes, very pretty."

I was very much embarrassed and kept my eyes down in order to avoid Nicette's glance.

"I am afraid, though, that it will be too large," continued Madame de Marsan. "Have you any others, my girl? Well, why don't you answer?"

Nicette did not hear, her eyes were fixed on me, and no doubt were expressive of many things, for Madame de Marsan in turn looked at her in astonishment; her pretty face, her uneasiness, my emotion, my embarrassed countenance caused Madame de Marsan to form suspicions which, without any doubt, were far from the truth. Women divine things so quickly and their imagination goes at a great rate. Madame de Marsan had not a particle of love left for me, but she had the curiosity which all women have in regard to love, and out of pure mischief she at once pretended to be very fond of me; she went into the shop leaning carelessly on my arm, she looked at me very

lovingly, she thee'd and thou'd me, a thing which she had not done twenty times since the beginning of our connection.

"My dear, what do you think of these trees? Tell me which you prefer, my dear Dorsan; I wish to choose only what will please you.

Anger and spite were stifling me, I could hardly answer her coherently. I looked at Nicette, I saw her turn pale and totter, while her eyes filled with tears; they seemed to say to me, "She loves you, you must therefore love her also."

Madame de Marsan saw all this, she smiled mischievously and looked closely at Nicette.

"Why, what is the matter with you, my girl?" said she in a disdainful tone, "you seem very much moved."

"Nothing is the matter with me, madame; nothing," answered the maiden in a trembling voice, casting her eyes first on Madame de Marsan and then on me.

"What is the price of this orange tree?"

"It's just what you like to give me, madame; it makes no difference to me."

"What, it makes no difference to you? — that's very singular. What do you say about it, my dear Dorsan? — but why don't you answer, I really don't know what's the matter with you."

"When you are willing, madame, we will go."

"Oh, I see very well, monsieur, that you have some reason for not wishing to remain here with

me. My presence seems to vex you and to trouble mademoiselle. Ha, ha! that's too good a joke, but really it's too bad of me to cause this young person mortification; it's really unexampled cruelty. Come, monsieur, whenever you like, I am ready, but I beg of you don't leave her disconsolate." At length she went out of the shop and I followed her, casting as I went a glance at Nicette, but she was crying and did not notice me.

When we got into the street Madame de Marsan laughed heartily as she chaffed me about my numerous flirtations and about the innocent flower-girl. I did not answer her, though I could easily have said some very mortifying things to her, but a man must be indulgent to one who has weakly yielded to him. At length we reached her house and I left her. I was anxious to see Nicette again, I wanted to tell her now all that I thought. I did not now wish to conceal from her the genuine affection with which she had inspired me and which I hitherto vainly fought against. That she shared this feeling I did not doubt; we would be happy. Yes, hereafter I would follow the dictates of my heart and that told me that I ought to win Nicette. The friendship between us had only been a screen for the love which we could no longer deny, and of what avail these efforts to conquer the feeling which attracted us one towards the other. Why should stern wisdom deprive us of happiness? Is one guilty in yielding to the happiness

of loving and of being loved? So I walked swiftly towards her dwelling, but when I reached it her shop was closed, nor could I see a light inside. I knocked, but I received no answer. Could she be asleep? No, no, I felt sure that she could not be asleep. I knocked again, and again. I received no answer. Where could she be? For an hour I hung about in front of her shop, I knocked once more, but uselessly. I felt certain that she was there, but that she would not open to me, that she was weeping and wanted to hide her tears from me. Perhaps she feared that I should reproach her for her conduct before Madame de Marsan. Dear Nicette, mused I; no, I shall not reproach thee for thy love; tomorrow I shall see thee again, tomorrow I shall console thee and I shall easily triumph over the resolutions of this night! Yielding to necessity, I resolved to wait till the morrow.

I had not slept, my mind was too uneasy, my heart too greatly agitated for me to be able to find repose. All night I made plans, wise, extravagant, delicious plans. Nicette was always preëminent in the delightful scenes that I pictured in my vivid imagination. I transformed her into a nymph, a great lady, a damsel of high degree. I was with her in a palace, in a hamlet, in a desert, but whatever the place we were happy. Oh! how sweet are these waking dreams when one loves and believes himself loved in return.

I rose at daybreak. I had twenty plans in my

head, and as usual I could not settle upon any one of them. I decided that I should first go and see Nicette, that was the most pressing thing. My dressing was soon accomplished, for I knew that in Nicette's eyes I always looked well. I left my dwelling, everybody was still asleep in the house, at least unless it happened that one of its inmates was very much in love. Madame Dupont, who could hardly be suspected of yielding to the tender passion, kept me waiting for a century before opening the entrance door. At length she heard me knocking and shouting at her casement. I was free.

In less than five minutes I had reached the shop, it was still closed; this tardiness astonished me, for Nicette was usually up so very early in the morning.

Should I wait for her? — must I knock? I was standing undecided in the street when a messenger passed by me. It was the one whom I had questioned some time ago; he recognized me and saluted me as he passed and went to his seat about twenty feet away. I went towards him without knowing what I wished to ask him, and the man, who had been pleased with my conduct on the former occasion, hastened to offer his services. "I don't need anything, my friend," said I in a dismal tone, mechanically putting a piece of five francs in his hand.

He looked at me in astonishment and, not dar-

ing yet to put the piece in his pocket, he waited until I should speak. I turned my eyes toward Nicette's shop and pointed it out to him.

"That flower merchant opens very late, it seems to me," I said.

"Why, it is still quite early, but for all that for some time past the flower-girl has been a little idle. Hang it! it's not at all surprising either."

"Why not?"

"Why, when a woman's head is taken up with love—"

"How do you know that?" I interrupted. "Who told you that she was in love?"

"Oh, it's easy enough to see those things. You must know that I have been in this place for twenty years past, and I should be well informed of all that goes on in the neighborhood."

"What do you know about this young girl? what have you seen? Answer me and hide nothing from me. Wait, take this also."

I fumbled again in my pocket and poured some silver into the messenger's hand. His astonishment was redoubled and he looked at me as though he was almost afraid.

"You told me before that this young girl was honest and virtuous and spoke to nobody in particular."

"That's true, monsieur, that is very true, she is always very modest, but when one is young, you know, they may have a liking and—"

"Come, speak right out, what makes you think that?"

"Oh, well, hang it, monsieur, I think so because I see an admirer come a-visiting her."

Nicette also had deceived me. Nicette did not love me; but no, I cannot believe that. I must question this man again. I supported myself against the post which was beside his stone bench, for I felt the need of something to support me; I trembled at seeing my unhappiness confirmed.

"You say that you have seen some one visit her."

"Yes, monsieur."

"How long has this been going on, as near as you can say?"

"Why, for about three weeks this individual has come prowling around; first of all he came in the morning to buy flowers, then, after that, he used to come back of an evening; first of all he chatted a little, then he stayed a little longer, so that now he comes every evening to talk for an hour or two with the pretty shopkeeper. But I am quite sure that there is nothing dishonorable in all this, the door of the shop is always wide open; that is, unless they meet elsewhere, which is quite possible, for women are sly, and one mustn't put too much trust in their airs of virtue and innocence."

"And what does this man look like?"

"Why, he is not exactly a young man, he must be quite forty years old, and he is not very good

looking, either; as to clothes, why, he is a gentleman of your kind, a man who looks as if he was somebody, and you can well imagine that the little flower-girl, who is so proud with people of her own condition, must have been flattered at making a conquest of a man of his sort and that it has carried her away."

"And he comes every evening."

"Yes, monsieur, every evening, or almost every evening. Oh, he hardly ever fails to come now."

"That's all I want to know."

I stole away from the messenger. This misfortune, of which I had not the slightest suspicion, tore my heart, and this at the moment when I wished to yield without reserve to my love for Nicette; when I wished to leave a society of which I was tired in order to live with her and for her — and at this moment I had lost her. She loved another, and I had felt so sure of her love. With this sweet illusion vanished also that delightful future of which I had dreamed only that morning. I was still in the street, I could not leave it. At length I saw the shop open. Nicette appeared; she looked pale and worn, but never had I thought her so pretty, never had I felt for her such deep affection. With that air of candor could she be deceitful. Alas, had I any right to complain, had she ever pledged her faith to me? had I ever told her that I loved her?—but was it necessary that I should tell her? It had seemed to me that we

had understood each other so well, we had both of us deceived ourselves. Should I speak to her, I asked myself? What was the use now? what could I say that would interest her? No, I would not see her again, I would forget her.

I don't know how it happened, but, although I was desirous of avoiding her, still I went on towards her until I found myself before her shop, where I stopped in spite of myself.

She came towards me with an air of constraint, her eyes were red as though she had been crying, but what could be the reason of her trouble? I did not know what to say to her and stood silently before her, she also was pensive—and this was the interview in which confidence should have reigned and over which love should have presided. Poor human beings whose plans are written in sand.

"I came here yesterday," said I at length, in a tone which I tried to render cold.

"Yesterday I saw you with —with that lady."

"No, I mean after that; I came back, I knocked at your door."

"I was not here."

"I thought that you never went out."

"I went out yesterday evening."

"You were at home and you would not open the door to me."

"Why should you think that, monsieur?"

"Sometimes one dislikes to be disturbed when one has company."

"Company."

"Yes, you heard me very plainly. Will you tell me now that you don't receive visitors. For the past three weeks has not a gentleman been coming to see you — almost every evening?"

She was embarrassed, she blushed. The messenger had not deceived me.

"Well, mademoiselle, you don't answer; is this true?"

"Yes, monsieur, it is the truth."

She confessed it to me. Ah, how I wished she would deny it, I should have been so happy to believe her. There was no further doubt for me, there was no further hope; we must part. I threw a last glance at her and I left abruptly, unwilling to allow her to see how her conduct had overcome me. She made a movement as if to restrain me, then she stopped on the sill of her door, and calmly watched me take my departure.

I resolved that I would think no further of this young girl; she was no better than the other. I was really unfortunate in my love affairs, for I had not yet met a faithful woman, they had deceived me, betrayed me, played with me; but the perfidy of all of them put together had caused me less pain than that which I experienced at Nicette's inconstancy. She must have discerned easily that I loved her; any woman can see that at a glance, and she had done all that she could to please me. She was so young to know how to feign love,

sensibility, gratitude. Ah, I should never believe in anything again.

But, before forgetting her entirely, I wanted to see who had taken my place in her heart, who had succeeded in pleasing her, whom she loved. Ah, how happy was he; I would now have given everything that I possessed to be loved by Nicette.

He came every evening they had told me. Well, to-day I should see him. There was a café nearly opposite her shop; I could wait there without being noticed, for I did not wish that the ungrateful girl should know all the agony of my smitten heart.

I passed my day as best I could, and when five o'clock came I went to the Rue Saint-Honoré. From afar I looked to see if she was at the door of her shop; she was not there, and I slipped into the café without being perceived. I placed myself at a table against the window. I asked for half a bowl of punch, because it would be natural that I should take some time in drinking it. The waiter made me twice repeat my order; no doubt he took me for an Englishman or a Dutchman, but that mattered little to me. I seized a paper and pretended to be reading it, but I did not take my eyes off the flower-shop.

Time seems long in passing when one is watching for anything, and it is still further the case when one suffers and fears. I thought night would never come. It was October, however, and at six

o'clock it grew dark; could it be that it was not six o'clock? I looked at the café clock, it was half-past five; but the clock was slow, no doubt, so I looked at my watch — twenty-nine minutes past five. The time was cruelly long. I tried to taste of the punch which was before me, but found it impossible to swallow, though I had not dined and had fasted since morning. At length night fell; but how could I now see into the shop? — how could I distinguish this man they had told me of? She was going to light up, I hoped; yes, here she was, bringing a lamp. She took in her flowers. What sadness and melancholy were depicted in her whole person. She seated herself in her shop, in front of the table, but she was not writing now; she sighed and often looked out into the street, she was expecting someone, and that someone was not me!

It was nearly seven o'clock and no one appeared. What if he should not come? But would that make me any happier? Had she not confessed this morning that I had learned the truth? — had not her blush, her embarrassment told me enough.

A man appeared, he went into the shop, he seated himself beside her. Good God! did not my eyes deceive me? — it was Raymond. Raymond beside Nicette, Raymond her lover, no, it was impossible.

I was abruptly leaving the café the better to assure myself of the truth, when some one ran after

me, some one stopped me. It was the waiter whom I had forgotten to pay. I didn't wait to listen to him, but put a crown into his hand and left him. The darkness prevented Nicette from seeing me in the street and I could thus get a nearer glimpse of her. It was really Raymond whom I saw; he was talking to her, and gesticulating forcibly as he talked, and she was listening to him attentively. I read in her eyes the interest she took in all that he said; she seemed to be much affected, she wept, he took her hand and pressed it tenderly, and she allowed him to do so. That charming hand was abandoned to Raymond; it was all done with so far as I was concerned, I could not doubt my misfortune. I resolved to fly while I still had the strength of will to tear myself away and never to see her again; I should even have liked to blot out her image from my heart, but the idea that Raymond was loved by her overwhelmed me, pursued me incessantly. It was for Raymond, then, that I had preserved this lily unsmirched, that I had respected its purity—and this is my recompense.

If some honest young fellow, born like her in an obscure class, had won her heart and sought her hand I should perhaps have been consoled, at least I should have been proud that I had left her unstained and worthy of his vows; but for a man like Raymond to win the heart of a girl like Nicette seemed incomprehensible to me. By what

charm could he have pleased her? He was not young, he was not handsome, he was foolish, vain, gossipy, tiresome; I at least had never found him amiable — and this was the man that she preferred to me. Oh, these women!

I was no longer surprised at the embarrassment which I had noticed in Raymond's manner when we last met. The traitor! this was why he evaded and avoided me now; this being was really my evil genius. He knew that I knew Nicette, he knew perhaps that I loved her. If I had listened only to my fury I should have called him out, but how can one obtain satisfaction from a coward? — and would his death make Nicette such as I had formerly known her? I determined to despise the one and forget the other, and this was the only action I should take.

I sought again to forget my troubles in sleep. What a different night was this from the last one. Yesterday I was making only the most delightful plans of love, of constancy; today I was cursing that sentiment and she who had called it forth. If the fatigue occasioned by so many emotions caused me to drowse for a moment, on opening my eyes my first thought was the remembrance of all my vanished hopes.

When I got up I could not resist the desire to speak with Raymond. I determined to control myself; I should know how to restrain myself and to hide the state of my mind, but speak to him

I must. I knocked and rang at his door; the portress had assured me that he was in and he had not the habit of rising early, but he did not open to me; I rang again, and this time his bell rope remained in my hand. I heard a noise at length, recognized his heavy tread, and soon his nasal tones came to my ear.

"Who's that making such a ringing at my door before seven o'clock in the morning? It's impossible for any one to sleep like this."

"It is I, neighbor Dorsan, and I want to speak to you."

It was some moments before he answered me, and when he did I heard from the sound of his voice that he was not pleased at my visit.

"What, is it you, my dear neighbor?"

"Yes, it is I."

"And what brings you here so early?"

"You know very well, but open the door; I don't like to talk through a door."

"Well, I'm in my shirt, you know."

"And what does it matter to me whether you have your shirt on, are naked, or fully attired, I have no desire to examine your person. Open the door now, you can go back to bed directly; that will not prevent me from speaking to you."

"Why, I have passed part of the night in composing some couplets for a fête and I wish to have a little more sleep."

"By Jove! Raymond if you don't open to me

I'll break down your door." The tone in which I said these last words showed him that I intended to enforce my threat. He did not make me repeat it, but opened the door to me and walking quickly through his little antechamber burrowed into the bedclothes and wrapped himself so closely in his covering that nothing was exposed but the tip of his nose and his big eyes, which he rolled around him uneasily, but without daring to fix them upon me. I followed him and the first thing which met my eyes on coming into his bedroom was a dozen bouquets of orange flowers, such as those which I had received formerly from Nicette, and which were symmetrically arranged on my neighbor's toilet table. The sight of them sent a pang to my heart, but I resolved to be philosophical and I seated myself near Raymond's bed and tried to speak very frankly with him.

"How are you this morning, M. Raymond?" He looked at me in astonishment.

"Was it to inquire after my health that you broke my bell pull and threatened to force my door?"

"Oh, you know very well that was only a joke; but I have something to ask you. You have a great many beautiful bouquets, it seems to me that you also like orange blossoms."

"Yes, yes, I'm very fond of the smell of them; it is very soothing to the nerves and I am excessively nervous."

"We seem to be alike in that respect, for these bouquets are astonishingly like those which adorned my room, and which you admired so much when you came to see me."

"That's true, yes, in fact it was that which gave me the idea of having some; I remember now."

"And is your flower-girl the same as mine?"

He did not know what to answer and his head disappeared for a moment under the bedclothes.

"Well, I'm waiting for your answer."

"Why I haven't any flower-dealer in particular, I go first to one and then to another."

"Come, M. Raymond, why should you pretend with me. Is this the confidence of which you wished me to give an example? Are you afraid of making me angry? Oh, don't be uneasy, for a long time I have given up thinking of that little Nicette."

This time he thrust his head entirely outside the coverings and looked at me with a joyful and surprised expression.

"What, really, are you thinking no longer of the little flower-girl?"

"Why, I never had any thought of her."

"Well, really I almost doubted myself whether you had; besides there was the Madame de Marsan affair, that must have occupied you considerably."

"Leave Madame de Marsan alone and tell me about your love affair with Nicette."

"Oh, that won't take long. I confess to you that I am excessively in love with her; you know how pretty she is."

"Oh, she has a saucy, irregular little face."

"Deuce take it, irregular! Do you call that face irregular? You are very difficult to please."

"Well, go on."

"I go courting to her almost every evening. At first she was rather cold and distant, but I knew so well how to coax her that now she can't get along without me, and I am sure that she quite adores me."

"Did she tell you that?"

"Well, very nearly; besides those things do not need to be told. One can discern them; I know women so well."

"You are more fortunate than I am; and do you mean to tell me that you have won her?"

"Well, not altogether yet, but it won't be long first; I'm pushing the thing along, I can tell you. With women, assiduity, tenacity, and amiability are certain to win the day in the long run. Oh, I'm a deuce of a fellow, and one has to be to please nowadays. Sentimentality, tender looks and sighs were very good formerly, but we do things differently now. At the first meeting with a woman one sets one's cap at her, at the second one provokes her, at the third one takes a kiss and so forth and so on." I could not restrain a movement of anger.

"That is to say, if she loves you," said I, rising suddenly. Raymond, affrighted by my action, again hid himself under the bedclothes.

"Have you another nervous attack?" he exclaimed without showing himself.

"No, no, nothing is the matter with me, M. Raymond; be happy, and above all make Nicette happy."

So saying I left him and went into my own rooms, where I shut myself up. There at least I could give free vent to the passion which agitated me, and which I had had the strength to control at Raymond's. My heart was a prey by turns to love, jealousy, spite, and the most gloomy sadness; I was only desirous now of conquering a weakness for which I blushed. I went out. During the next week I went into society and gave myself up to all that is termed pleasure, but that which formerly pleased me had no longer the least charm for me; I went to balls, to plays, to concerts, to fêtes and to the most brilliant parties — everywhere I was bored and disconsolate; above all I bore in the depths of my heart a black melancholy, a depression which I could not overcome.

I was always glad to get back home; I felt better there. There my pensive memories gave rise to new grief, but this grief had a charm which nothing in society could give me. However, in order to forget her I found it would be necessary to change my abode. How could I help thinking

of her in this room? on this bed where she had slept? — everything in this chamber recalled her and fed my love, I must get away from it. I must leave Paris, which hereafter would be insupportable to me. Distance, change of scene, and time, which are said to be a cure for everything — these were the remedies which I should apply to this mad passion which dominated me. I made up my mind to go and see my sister; she had ceased to expect me, still she would be glad to see me, at least I should be with those who loved me. It seemed to me now that this would do me good; my preparations were promptly finished. I closed my lodging, which I kept, although I had resolved to live there no longer. I forbade Madame Dupont to allow anybody to enter except herself, for she had charge of it. I paid two terms rent in advance and I departed for my sister's.

I arrived at the country house where my sister usually lived. From afar I noticed that the shutters of the windows were closed; could they be travelling?—she would have written to me. I rang at the gate and the gardener came to it and told me that Monsieur and Madame Déneterre had gone to spend the winter at Melun, and that they no longer came to their country house except on Sundays when the weather was exceptionally fine. To Melun then I would go; it was only a short three miles, and I could easily walk that distance. Night was coming on, but the moon had risen

and lit the way. While walking along I tried to think what could have made my dear relations change their way of living, they had never before quitted their country house; but they had now been married for some years and were beginning to have less to say to each other, and then the winter evenings must have seemed long to them, so they thought they would pass them at the town. This is how all plans of conduct end. Is there anything in the world that will withstand the effects of time.

I saw the first houses of Melun, a pretty little town where formerly I had found a good deal of amusement, and which perhaps seemed delightful to me now because Paris seemed insupportable. One thing about it was certain, and this was that change of scene would necessarily bring about distraction, and distraction is the best remedy for the heart and mind; besides, I was not a Werther, I had no desire to go and die of my love and grief in forests on the edges of precipices; on the contrary, I sought a cure for them. That was the wisest thing to do; it was of course less romantic, but it was more natural, and I am always in favor of what is natural. I had made them give me my sister's address; I passed through a part of the town which answered to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and presently came to Déneterre's house. In the country one person alone lives in a house, while in Paris three families often live on the same

floor. I confess that it is more agreeable to be alone in the house, where one is able to do what one pleases without fear of inconveniencing his neighbors or of meeting disagreeable faces on the staircase, dishonest servants, peevish children, a cat or a dog on one's doormat, when, for proprieties' sake, one keeps no animals one's self, and finally, to be able to discharge one's porter when he fails in respect, while in Paris one must pay him, however insolent he is, unless one wishes to risk passing the night in the street or at the guard house merely because one has forgotten the time in visiting at a friend's; these are great advantages in favor of the country.

My sister uttered an exclamation of surprise and joy when she saw me, she threw herself on my neck and kissed me.

"Is it you?" she said to me, "my dear Eugene. Really, I did not expect to see you before next spring. Well, it's very nice of you to remember your relations at last."

I did not tell her that the desire to forget Nicette had alone made me leave Paris, that would have been useless; besides, I wanted to avoid my dear Amélie's commentaries, for she was a bit of a gossip, as one must be when one lives in the country where one has not sufficient occupation to keep one from meddling in one's neighbors' affairs.

My sister sent for her husband, who had gone to play a game of billiards with some of his friends.

"He doesn't pass all of his evenings at home, then?" said I to Amélie.

"Oh, my dear, in winter the evenings are so long one has to do something. In country towns they play billiards or cards, that is the general taste, and one has to do as others do."

"That's quite right, that's what I have always thought, and that's what I said when you married and made plans for your future habits of life, that they weren't like anybody else's. You told me then that I was a heedless fellow, a crack-brained idiot, because I made fun of your plans for retiring yourselves from society and of the happiness that you would enjoy in your dual solitude — but you see you haven't kept to your solitude."

"But that is for the winter only, for then the country is so very dull, one sees nobody there and one cannot go out walking. Everybody is so sociable in a town; they give parties, they play games, sometimes they dance, in fact, they always find something to amuse themselves; that is why we came here. You don't find any fault with that, do you? — one must do as everybody else does."

"Why, I think that's very natural, and you are happy, are you not?"

"Yes, my dear, very happy! my husband is very good-natured; he is rather stubborn, it is true, and he won't always listen to me when I prove to him that I am in the right; and so we sometimes have little disputes, but nothing to speak of."

"No, besides you must do as everybody else does."

"You haven't kissed my two little boys; they are darlings, such cute little rascals, and so much spirit, but you will be able to judge of that when you see them."

"Where are they, then?"

"They are in bed, it's almost eight o'clock."

"Then you mustn't wake them up."

"No, you shall see them tomorrow. It's more than a year since you came to see us, why it's fifteen months at least, and during that time they have grown a great deal; the eldest is now four years old and the second is three, you must tell us who you think they are like."

Then Déneterre's arrival interrupted our conversation; my brother-in-law evinced much pleasure at seeing me, he welcomed me frankly and cordially and invited me to spend the winter with them at Melun, and the expression of his eyes agreed with what he said. I noticed that as he came in he was holding a billiard cue; we chatted for a minute or two of business and the news from Paris. Déneterre was contented and prosperous; he was making a great deal of money, his business was growing, and he hoped in a few years to be able to retire and live on his property.

While we were talking Amélie came and went, gave orders, had a room made ready for me and invited me to take something before supper.

"I never eat supper," I said to her.

"You will have supper here, my dear, it is one of the customs of the place, and I assure you it is not at all disagreeable."

"So be it, I will eat supper when I am hungry."

"By the way," said Déneterre, "where are my children? Why don't they come and kiss their uncle?"

"Why, my dear, they are in bed," said Amélie.

"In bed already! why that's not common sense; you put them to bed too early."

"It is necessary for their health that they should go to bed early."

"Nonsense, boys don't need so much sleep."

"Boys who are running and playing all day long need rest in the evening."

"Well, I want them to come and kiss their uncle."

"They can kiss him tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow, tomorrow, that's not at all the same thing; I'm going to get them."

"And wake them up! the idea! I should like to see you do it; I'm not going to have them made ill."

"You'll make them ill if you make them sleep like dormice."

"You'll see whether I won't govern my own children."

"They are boys, and it is for me to bring them up."

"You don't understand anything about bringing them up. It's not my fault that they're not girls."

As I saw that the discussion was growing warm I hastened to change the conversation by going to get the billiard cue, which I brought to Déneterre.

"Is this your cue?" said I.

"Yes, it's a prize that I lately won at pool."

"Oh, you play pool, do you?"

"Every evening, and I am quite an expert."

"Well, go and finish your game, you know there mustn't be any ceremony between us; besides, I'm tired and I'm going to bed."

"Well, I'll see you tomorrow in that case," said Déneterre, hastily taking his cue, "tomorrow you will be with us, and you will see how much better I play than I did last year, especially since I use cues with tips."

Déneterre left us and Amélie led me to my room, showing me part of the house on the way, and gave me the details of all the improvements they had had made and all that they were going to make. I thought my sister's conversation something like that of the gentleman with whom I had dined at Madame de Marsan's country house, who had dwelt so complacently on the details of his poultry-yard and hen-houses; but I began to understand that for people who had nothing else to do or to think of, the history of the hatching of a fowl or the nurture of a rabbit might be of much

interest. While we were talking I asked of my sister if she often had disputes with her husband.

"Disputes," answered she in surprise, "why we hardly ever have them."

"However, it seemed to me that just now you were having one."

"Oh, did you think that we were disputing? Why, my dear, that is nothing; during the day we have a hundred little discussions like that, but they are not disputes. Don't you see that when people live together it is extremely difficult for them to be of the same opinion."

"It seems to me that it would be much better if they were."

"That is impossible. Oh, my dear Eugene, one can easily see that you are a bachelor. You understand nothing of conjugal life; but I hope that before long you will know the sweet happiness of married life, of which you have not yet any idea."

"No, as for that I confess that I haven't the slightest idea of it."

"Patience, all that will come. Good-night, my dear Eugene."

My sister left me. I went to bed reflecting on the manner of living of which Amélie and her husband had just given me a specimen. Their's was, however, a charming household, at least everybody said so.

This much was certain, my sister was virtuous

and faithful to her husband, and Déneterre was very fond of his wife and children — why then did they so often dispute? Come, I see, then, that my sister is right, I said to myself. Here am I arguing about conjugal happiness and I haven't the least idea what it is; let's go to sleep, that will be much better worth while.

My journey had tired me, but the meeting with my sister and her husband had relieved my melancholy to some extent; for all trouble will yield in time to distraction. I went to sleep calmer than I had been for a long time past, and my slumber no doubt would have been prolonged far into the morning had not my dear nephews charged themselves with the duty of waking me up. At seven o'clock in the morning I heard a great noise in my room and felt myself pulled by a leg and an arm. I opened my eyes and saw my sister's two children, who had climbed on my bed and were amusing themselves with playing tricks and rolling over me. While I was looking at them, still half asleep, shouts of laughter came from behind me; I drew my curtain and saw Déneterre seated a short distance from my bed, laughing at my surprise.

"Well, here they are," he said to me, "what do you think of them?"

"Why, they seem very well, according to what I see."

"Aren't they nice little chaps?"

"Very nice; yes, really."

"Oh, I shall make jolly fellows of them; they are as cheerful and lively as possible."

"So I perceive; just tell them not to pinch me so hard, will you? Here is one of them won't leave go of my calf."

"It's only in play, my dear fellow; every morning I am awakened like that. Tell me, is it not the sweetest pleasure?"

"Yes, no doubt for a father it must be delightful; but for an uncle, you see, it hasn't quite the same charm."

"Well, by Jove! it's your own fault if you don't know the happiness of being a father; marry, and then you will have children yourself who will caress you as mine caress me."

"Oh, no doubt I shall do so some day."

"Come, my jolly boys, kiss your uncle and leave him to dress himself."

The jolly boys, to prove their affection for me, threw themselves flat on me, seized my head and slobbered me all over the face, trying to see who could give me the most kisses. I was suffocated and shouted for mercy and their papa was obliged to order them to stop, but they would listen no more to him than to me and continued to lavish their caresses. Happily my sister arrived and then the scene was changed. She advanced angrily towards her husband.

"What, you brought these children to their

uncle before I had them bathed and their faces washed, their hair combed or their clothes put on?"

"Why, what does that matter, my darling? Is it necessary that they should be all dressed up to come and say good-morning to their uncle?"

"It isn't a question of dressing them up, but I was anxious that Eugene should see them first looking as they ought to look, and when once they get to playing there is no way of holding them in; but you do everything without consulting me."

"My dear sister, I assure you that I think them very nice as they are."

"Come, gentlemen, breakfast is waiting for you."

The word breakfast made my little rascals hasten to get away; they were very quickly off my bed and then I got up.

It seemed to me that examples of conjugal happiness were succeeding very rapidly at my sister's. It occurred to me, however, that if I should marry I should not take their example as to the manner of bringing up children, but I had only arrived the evening before; I must wait before judging.

I joined the family in the dining-room. While breakfasting, Amélie and her husband informed me as to their way of life. In the morning they attended to business, work, or went out walking when the weather permitted; in the evening Déneterre went to the café to play pool while his wife

made her toilet to go into society, which she did very often. Every day in the week was taken up. On Monday there was a select party at the notary's which the best-known people in the town attended; they played little there, but they talked politics and there one learned everything that was new in all the cabinets of Europe; they discussed the affairs of each power and they read the "Moniteur." On Tuesday they went to the house of a retired merchant. The old gentleman was very rich and his guests fared luxuriously—at his house they served beer, cracknels and sweetened water flavored with orange-flower; there they played high; boston at six blancs[1] and écarté at five sous; at times the bets went up as high as seventy-five centimes, but they also played all other games in style there, and whist and boston to perfection. Nobody took the odd tricks except he had eight points; each one played independently and it was very rare to see anyone revoke during the evening.

On Wednesday they went to the house of a registrar's widow who had four daughters to marry and no fortune to give them; there they played parlor games, charades, and propounded conundrums; in the first place, that required no cards and less candles, and then in playing parlor games young people become acquainted quickly—they talk and

[1] The blanc was an old French copper coin worth not quite so much as an English farthing; six blancs made five farthings English.

laugh together. More than one love match has had its beginning at a game of crambo or forfeits, for in making the confidences necessary to the game it is so easy to say a few words which lead to an understanding, and more than one marriage has been made like this. When one has four daughters to provide for one must not neglect anything. Everything was very well done, however, and the strictest propriety ruled over these little games; blindman's buff was forbidden.

On Thursday they met at the house of an old judge, but everyone was not invited there, only the upper ten. There it was forbidden to talk politics, war, affairs of state and journalistic reports. They did not play cards, because that would set a bad example for youth; they did not dance, because the judge's wife, who was an elderly coquette, did not choose to be a wallflower and could never get any partners; they did not play charades, because that would disturb the order of an apartment, cause the furniture to be moved and the curtains torn; they did not play parlor games, because the judge thought them indecent; and no refreshments were served, because people of the highest breeding never require refreshments. With these exceptions the guests could do as they pleased, and amuse themselves as they could.

On Friday they went to the house of an electeur[1], whose young and pretty wife followed all the

[1] Electeur, a member of the electoral college which elects the Senators.

styles of the capital. There one did anything that one wished, there was no restraint, no ceremony; it was allowable to dance or to sing, when people wished to do either; sometimes they had music, for there was a piano; they played all kinds of games, from loto up to checkers, and people could play for a sou or a louis, as it pleased them; one might say anything that one wished, one might laugh or joke, or speak according to his taste, opinions were freely expressed, almost all the newspapers were to be found there, and all kinds of refreshments and cakes were served; it was an imitation of the parties of the Chaussée-d'Antin at Paris.

On Saturday, oh, as to that day, everybody met at my sister's.

"You shall see," she said to me, "how we amuse ourselves, such a noise as we make, everybody is in such high spirits, one can't hear one's self speak, everybody laughs; it's who shall be gayest. In fact, sometimes the time passes so quickly that they are still here at half-past ten."

"At half-past ten in the morning, do you mean?"

"Why, no, in the evening; you're mad."

"Well, do you call that late?"

"I should think we did. The custom is to retire at ten o'clock precisely."

"Good heavens! I'm not astonished that your children come to wake you up before seven o'clock"

in the morning. Well, and what do you do on Sundays."

"Oh, on Sundays we go to the mayor's, there's always a good many people there; they play billiards, and besides that they have dancing for the young people. You may imagine how pleasurable all that is! This, my dear Eugene, is how we pass each week. You see there is something new every day, and we don't have time to be bored."

"Don't you have any plays?"

"Very rarely, one can get along without them."

"And no concerts?"

"No, except those that we get up among ourselves, and then on fine days there are charming walks in the neighborhood,— the little Rochette woods, Terois-Mouins, a thousand delightful spots; then fishing, hunting and the news of the town, the little secrets which everybody knows at the end of the week, the quarrels, the talk, the scandal, the fashions, one takes more notice of those things here than in Paris. Then there are fêtes, dinners, baptisms, marriages; but the marriages are the best, one of them affords us occupation for a month. Oh, you will see, my dear, that people amuse themselves much better in the provinces than in Paris."

My sister only interrupted her recital of the delights of provincial life because she saw that her husband was giving her little boys coffee to drink, which brought on a slight discussion.

"Why are you giving coffee to those children? it is not good for them."

"Pshaw!"

"It will make them nervous."

"Pshaw."

"And then they won't sleep at night."

"Pshaw, pshaw."

"Oh, you weary me with your pshaw, pshaw; in fact, I won't let them take it."

"Just a taste."

"Not even a taste."

"It's more than three parts milk."

"I don't care if it was double that; come here, messieurs, and drink no more of it."

"I want some, I do."

"Here, drink this, my boy."

"Will you obey me at once?"

"Come, leave them alone."

"No, I don't wish that they should drink it."

My sister seized the cup, her husband held it, and the children howled. Fortunately the cup could not stand the strain, it was broken and the coffee was spilled, which put an end to this scene of domestic pleasure to which I had hardly got accustomed. The day was occupied in showing me the town and in taking me to visit intimate acquaintances. I let them take me wherever they wished, and my complacence and docility delighted my sister; she thought me much steadier and more reasonable than on my last visit.

After dinner Déneterre took me to play a game of pool at his café, after which we returned to get my sister to go to a party. Unfortunately for me it was Thursday, the day of the old judge's party, where I saw only stern and severe faces and stiff, inflexible figures. Happily we did not go there till half-past eight and left at a quarter to ten, which reduced the evening to an hour and a quarter, of which the first third was spent in bowing and curtseying, the second in noddings of the head and the exchange of commonplaces, and the third in yawns which one hid with his hands, his handkerchief, or his snuff box.

On the evening of the next day we went to the electeur's. This indemnified me a little for the way which I had been bored the evening before; there I found some pretty women and a little more ease and gayety. In a week I had run the gauntlet of all the reunions and I knew the whole town. I was well received everywhere; was I not rich and a bachelor? which was more than sufficient to secure me a welcome.

I was beginning to get accustomed to the conjugal discussions and to the tricks of my nephews, who were veritable little demons. Take it all together I understood my sister and her husband might be happy; occasional storms must be expected even when the skies of life are fairest and most smiling, as in a picture shadows are necessary to throw up the lighter parts. So their quarrels

did not prevent them from loving each other, and their children's defects were embellishments in their eyes. If I should marry, however, I hope not to have so many discussions with my wife, and I expect to bring my children up in an altogether different manner; but I should perhaps have sorrows which my sister and her husband did not know.

I had been in this little provincial town for a fortnight. I can't exactly say that I amused myself there, but I did not find it unpleasant. The novelty of this kind of life, the original-looking faces that I saw each evening, the friendship of my sister and her husband — all this distracted me. Time had its usual effect, my sadness was dissipated and I returned to my former self; however, I could not entirely forget Nicette. I felt that I loved her still, but when her image presented itself to my thought I sternly excluded it and imposed silence on my heart.

I should have greatly liked to fall in love again, if it was but a caprice, one of those flames which had formerly seized me and so quickly burned out; but my desire was vain, I was incapable of experiencing that. I looked around me and saw many pretty women, many faces formed to please, but I saw none that resembled Nicette.

CHAPTER VI

Mademoiselle Pélagie. They Want to Marry Me

This sister of mine was in reality one of the best of women, notwithstanding her little stubbornnesses. She was deeply attached to her only brother, your humble servant, and accordingly she was highly delighted that I did not speak of returning to Paris, so, to recompense me for my complaisance, she did her utmost to procure for me, everyday, what she called new pleasures.

It would have afforded her the utmost satisfaction could she but have settled me at Melun, and to this end all her efforts were directed. From time to time she asked my opinion in regard to the young ladies I had seen the evening before. She detailed at great length the virtues, the accomplishments and the qualities of each one of them; then she lauded the happiness of the married state and the delight of seeing one's children about one, which did not prevent my hearing her, however, a few moments later, shouting at her boys and disputing with her husband; but it is well understood that that is one of the delights of married life.

My dear sister! I could see what she was driving at; she was returning to her favorite plan. She wanted me to do as other people did, that was her continual refrain; and then the arranging of one's brother's marriage is such an important affair in a little town. What a source of conversation, confidences, visits, fêtes, new gowns and, in consequence, what a source of pleasure. Up to the present I had not allowed her to tempt me, but I began, however, also to believe that I ought to do as other people did, especially as I had lost the desire to be flighty, the longing to run after every beauty, which is common to young men. For a long time there had been only one whose presence I desired, but since she had deceived me I must try and forget her also.

I had remarked for several days that my sister seemed more satisfied. I often saw her whisper with Déneterre, who always ended by doing everything that she wanted. She praised still further the happiness of marriage, but no longer eulogized any of the young ladies whom I had seen. She had some new hope, and later on I should learn how it concerned me.

"This evening," said Amélie to me, "I must get myself up finer than usual. You will accompany me, will you not, dear Eugene? It is Madame Lepine (the electeur's wife) who receives to-day, and they say that there will be a good many people there."

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I often saw her whisper with Démerite.

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ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R L

"But it seems to me that I always see the same people."

"Oh, this evening there will be some new faces for you; Madame de Pontchartrain has returned from her country house, she will join the gathering."

"Who is this Madame de Pontchartrain?"

"A very highly respected person, who has seven thousand livres income and is seventy years old."

All this, no doubt, was worthy of respect, but I could not see what would be interesting to me in Madame de Pontchartrain; however, I would go to the party and I should no doubt solve the enigma.

After dinner my sister went upstairs to dress. I had thought when I was in Paris that its women were very vain, but since I had dwelt in the provinces I could render justice to the beauties of the capital, who passed at least two hours less before their mirrors than do the belles of a little town. Déneterre had gone to play his game of pool, and I walked about the garden while my sister got ready; for the first time I was impatient at her dilatoriness, which would make me late in getting to Madame Lepine's; ordinarily I accompanied her merely to oblige her, but one sometimes has presentiments.

At last my sister was ready, Déneterre came back, we started and shortly arrived at our destination; there are no long distances in a little town.

We were announced, for in a provincial place one does not go into a drawing-room unannounced — in good society. I glanced over the company and remarked nothing new. I was almost ill-humored about it, but while Madame Lepine arranged the card parties I saw my sister go up to her and heard her say,—

"My brother will not play at cards this evening; don't count on him for boston or reversi, he prefers parlor games."

I had not said a word of this to my sister,—how came it that she acted thus without consulting me? I was going to her to demand an explanation, when the servant announced Madame de Pontchartrain and her niece.

Oh, she had a niece, had she? I began to understand. All looks were turned towards the door; I did like everyone else, and I saw a big, bony, thin, yellow woman who, despite her age, seemed to have kept all the vivacity of her youth; it was the aunt, but we will quickly slip by her and occupy ourselves with the niece. A flattering murmur was heard as she came into the drawing-room; in fact, this niece was very pretty; she was of middle height, well-built, and held herself rather straight, but that was the effect of education; her features were regular, her complexion as fresh as a rose, her hair was very beautiful and her eyes very large; as to their color, I did not yet know what that was, for she constantly kept them lowered.

While Madame Lepine went to meet Madame de Pontchartrain and her niece, all the young people whispered together as they examined the newcomer, in whom they were no doubt looking for defects which they would not be long in finding; for women are very ready to see with a glance of the eye anything that might detract from their rivals. I saw my sister looking furtively at me, trying to learn from the expression of my eyes what effect the sight of Madame de Pontchartrain's niece had had upon me.

Oh, my poor Amélie! my heart is quite tranquil — tranquil? alas, no, it is not so yet, but it is not this young person who has agitated it, I would it were; she is very pretty, she must be pleasing, and I should be delighted to love her.

The niece was named Pélagie, I heard her aunt call her so. The old lady had placed herself at a whist table, and did not stir from it up to the moment that she left. She exhorted her niece to amuse herself and not to be so shy. Pélagie blushed and answered very softly, "Yes, aunt." This young person appeared to be innocence itself.

Madame Lepine bore off Mademoiselle Pélagie and led her to the circle who were playing games. I placed myself beside her, for I was curious to make acquaintance with this young innocent; I saw that all the young ladies' eyes were upon me as I put my chair beside Pélagie's; spite and jealousy already shone in their eyes. In the provinces

they interpret so quickly the slightest action, the smallest preference; but it did not matter to me what these young ladies thought, I was free to do as I pleased.

How uncharitable young people are among themselves. The young ladies who came habitually to these parties enjoyed the embarrassment and timidity of the new-comer, and sought to augment it still further by putting to her the most difficult question in the game and giving her the most embarrassing things to do. I perceived this little manœuvre and tried to put Mademoiselle Pélagie more at her ease. Once she wanted to thank me and had commenced a phrase of which the conclusion was inaudible to me; but she momentarily raised her eyes, and I saw that they were blue and very gentle and sweet in expression.

Madame Lepine, who was extremely pleasant and did all that was possible to amuse her company, asked Madame de Pontchartrain if her niece was a musician.

"Yes, madame," answered the aunt, "Pélagie sings and accompanies herself on the piano."

The young ladies immediately begged Pélagie to sing something for them, hoping to be able to criticise her. Pélagie refused very awkwardly, she looked at her aunt and the latter darted a glance at her which signified plainly, "Sing," and the young person rose. I led her to the piano and offered to accompany her.

"No, monsieur," answered she, "I can accompany myself very well."

Anybody else would have thanked me in quite a different manner, but I saw that Pélagie was simplicity itself and that she did not understand how to gild her speech.

She sang us an old ballad in six couplets. It was a love song, though one would have doubted it in listening to Pélagie, who gave no expression either to her song or to her accompaniment. A Parisian young lady, even had she only just left boarding-school, would certainly have played and sung much better than that; she would have rolled her eyes gracefully, while Pélagie had not raised them from the keys; she would have put some life into the tender expressions, while Pélagie sang them very coldly. At first this comparison did not seem advantageous to Pélagie, but when I reflected that that which prevented her from appearing to good advantage proved her innocence and her modesty, I thought her awkwardness was entirely in her favor.

My sister was delighted; she had seen me sit down beside Pélagie, speak to her quite frequently, lead her to the piano, and take her back to her chair. Here was more than enough to indicate that I was beginning to fall in love with her, which would naturally end in a marriage. The evening ended, everyone was going, but Amélie managed to find an opportunity of presenting me to the

great aunt, who honored me with an almost gracious glance. As we went down the staircase I found myself beside Pélagie, and could not do otherwise than offer her my hand. The young lady looked at her aunt, who with a glance accorded her permission to accept my courtesy, and Pélagie then very awkwardly held out her hand to me. I was careful to take only the tips of her fingers, feeling that I must conform to the manners and customs of the town. The ladies, who only lived a few steps away, soon reached their door, where we left them after the three bows which were strictly required by etiquette, and I noticed that Mademoiselle Pélagie was very strong on curtseys.

When we had reached home Amélie led the conversation to Mademoiselle Pélagie. I had expected this. I left her to talk with her husband, and it was who could praise the young girl most.

"She is a charming young person."

"Really she is the prettiest young lady in Melun."

"And she is so perfectly well-bred."

"Her manners are very superior."

"She has been very strictly educated, and how well she behaves, how modest she is in company."

"She is ingenuousness personified."

"She is an excellent musician."

"And no one would suspect it, because she hasn't the slighest pretension."

"Her aunt has no one but her to inherit her property."

"She is an excellent match."

"The husband that takes her will not do badly."

"And he will be sure of his wife's virtue."

Rendered impatient by the fact that I said nothing, my sister at last addressed me,—

"Well, Eugene, tell us what you think of Mademoiselle de Pontchartrain?"

"My dear sister, what can I add to the eulogy that you have just been sounding?"

"Are you not of our opinion?"

"Why, somewhat."

"Oh, you don't want to confess it, but I could see very well that you thought her very pretty."

"As for that, she is pretty."

"Well-bred."

"Well-bred; I think so, but—"

"Well she pleased you, did she not, my dear brother?"

"Pleased me, why as to that—I haven't said anything that could make you think that.'

"Why, I think that it would be quite natural. Come, your Parisian young ladies can never resemble charming Pélagie."

"Resemble her? no, I quite agree with you there."

Amélie seemed very much pleased, though I had a great mind to tell her that she was deceiving herself, for she was sure that I was in love with

Pélagie. Déneterre kept repeating that it would be an excellent match, and as I could not put an end to their talk I took myself off to bed.

For several days nothing new occurred to disturb the order of existence at my sister's. Every evening I accompanied her to some party or other, for when I wished to excuse myself she always found a way of making me yield to her desires, so every evening I met Mademoiselle Pélagie with her aunt, who never failed to come and have her game of whist or reversi, which she played in the morning also with three dowagers who had done nothing else for the past fifteen years, and for whom cards were such a serious matter that one of them wept when anybody cut a king for her, and the other made herself ill because she had to disgorge the knave of hearts.

Pélagie took part in the parlor games, but she was always just as embarrassed, just as timid as on the first day that I had seen her. As she was very pretty the other young ladies had no compassion upon her; some of the young gallants of the town paid her a good many compliments and made many pretty speeches to her, things which men of wit dare no longer say because they have been worn threadbare; but the little dandies of Melun did not seem to make an impression upon Pélagie, who listened very coldly to these gentlemen's compliments and made them no answer except a deep curtsey. The young gentlemen,

vexed because they were unable to produce more effect, had fluttered on butterfly wings to more honeyed flowers; I alone remained faithful to Mademoiselle de Pontchartrain, and I alone also obtained from her answers which were a little less laconic. It is true that I did not pay her embarrassing compliments, and that I put myself on her footing by talking of very simple subjects. Her manner with me was less timid, she looked at me sometimes when she answered me, and she had half smiled at me twice, decidedly she had distinguished me.

The novelty of this manner of paying court amused and distracted me; my heart was not in the least fluttered when I was with Pélagie; however, since I had seen her I had thought less of Nicette. This young maiden took up my mind, and though I had no love for her it gave me pleasure to be with her; her pretty face conduced to this pleasure, while her timidity and modesty attracted me still further.

My sister said nothing more to me, but I saw that she was extremely well satisfied. The grand aunt welcomed me in her very best manner; she sometimes interrupted her play to ask me how I was, which indicated the extreme favor in which she held me. The young ladies, to tell the truth, did not evince the same interest in me nor show as much pleasure on my arrival, and imposed no more forfeits upon me which involved the neces-

sity of kissing some of them, but as I had not valued this privilege I paid no attention to their indifference; the mammas began to whisper when they saw me, while the papas smiled mischievously, all of which indicated that they expected a great event and I was perhaps the only one that did not think what it was that interested the whole town.

Déneterre was the first to open my eyes.

"And when shall we have the wedding?" said he, rubbing his hands.

"What do you mean, what wedding?"

"Why, hang it, man, yours."

"Mine! and with whom?"

"With whom?—with whom? Well, you are very discreet, but we have eyes, my dear fellow, and we know what grounds we have for thinking of it."

"Why, it seems to me that I also have the faculty of sight, and I have seen nothing symptomatic of a wedding."

"Come, my dear Eugene," said my sister in her turn, "Why should you have any pretence with us, your good friends; you love Pélagie, what do I say? you love her, you adore her, I am sure of it; the whole town knows it. Oh, it is no longer a secret."

"Oh, the whole town knows it, eh."

"Yes, my dear, and the young lady has a preference for you, that is easily seen; besides, no one is casting any reflections upon you. The aunt is

very much pleased about it, she knew our mother and thinks a great deal of our family; she will settle a thousand crowns income on her niece when she marries and give her the rest of her fortune at her death. It seems to me that is not to be despised; with what you possess already you can maintain a delightful household. Tell me, now, when do you want me to go and ask her hand?"

I listened to my sister and I confess that I was very much astonished at what I heard. However, when I gave the matter due reflection I could understand that my conduct, which in Paris would not even have been noticed, would in a little town give rise to conjectures as to my intention of offering myself in marriage to Mademoiselle de Pontchartrain.

Amélie and her husband so often repeated that I loved Pélagie, that they ended in making me believe it also. After all, should I do badly in marrying this little ingenue? If I was not in love with her I should perhaps be all the happier, and I was well aware that I could not experience a new love. All that I could do was to extinguish that which tortured me against my will.

Beside this innocent Pélagie the days rolled tranquilly along; she was timid, modest, well-bred, a husband could make of her what he would. Friendship is, they say, more durable than love. I would begin by having friendship for my wife, and in the end I should probably love her the

longer; I should not be jealous, and that was one torture the less; I should have children and I should bring them up in a different manner to that in which my sister was bringing up hers; and, finally, with a sweet-tempered, candid wife, who had very little to say, I should not be exposed to those little discussions which Amélie called conjugal privileges, but which seemed to me very disagreeable quarrels.

All these reflections threw me into a state of indecision which my sister interpreted according to her favorite idea. Persuaded that I secretly loved Pélagie, that Pélagie worshipped me, and that this union would make me the happiest of husbands and assure my tranquillity for the future, Amélie pressed me, teased me, persecuted me to authorize her to ask Mademoiselle de Pontchartrain's hand; at every turn she drew a new picture of the felicity of married life. Déneterre did the same; first to satisfy his wife, and second because he really thought it would be a good match for me; in fact, there was no one, down to my nephews, who did not have something to say on the subject; for they, who had learned their lesson well, every day as they jumped on my knees or my shoulders said to me,—

"Uncle, when are we going to your wedding?"

I am naturally easy-going, as you will have perceived; tired of being teased from morning till night about getting married, I saw that I must

decide to do so or leave the little town, where they already called me Mademoiselle de Pontchartrain's future husband.

But if I returned to Paris what should I do there now that I was tired of bachelor life? now that I felt the need of loving, of attaching myself to someone, and of detaching myself from her whom I had loved so much? "Come," I mused, "I must marry, I must worship my wife, if that be possible; may she be for me the anchor of salvation." The result of these reflections was that one day I answered my sister's solicitations by saying, "Do just as you like about it."

Amélie asked nothing further of me. She flung her arms around my neck, kissed me without giving me the chance to answer a single word, and, hurrying immediately to Madame de Pontchartrain, she asked Pélagie's hand for her brother. She returned in half an hour with a favorable answer.

"She will give her to you," cried she, "you have won her, all is arranged, settled; tomorrow I am going to put up the banns."

I thought my sister rather expeditious, but there was no way of drawing out of it; the offer was made and accepted, I was engaged. What! I was going to be married? I was going to wed Pélagie, whom I hardly knew; really, it still seemed to me that this could only be a joke, I could not realize that I was going to be Mademoiselle de Pontchartrain's husband.

Since my marriage was settled I had permission to go alone to Madame de Pontchartrain's to pay my court to her niece in her presence.

In the evening I sometimes escorted the ladies into society and also took them home. I did not find this very amusing; the etiquette, the ceremony, the meaningless trifles of this provincial life were beginning to weary me; but when once I should be married I resolved that I would return to Paris and introduce my wife to another kind of life.

In spite of all the trouble that my sister was taking to forward the preparations for what she called the instant of my happiness, it would be a month before I became Pélagie's husband, and during that month I hoped to make fuller acquaintance with my future wife. I saw her, it is true, every evening, but that was in society; it was in playing at little games, where everybody had their eyes fixed on us to watch what people who were going to be married would have to say to each other. Poor little things! in vain did you lend your ears, stretch your necks and try to catch our slightest words; you heard nothing that could give you any information on that subject, for Mademoiselle de Pontchartrain and I had not yet spoken of it. It may seem surprising that an expectant husband had not yet spoken of love and marriage to her to whom he was engaged, but I must confess that I do not like to take the whole world into my confidence,

to share my thoughts with them; and in society it was very difficult to say to Pélagie anything that would not be heard by all those ears which surrounded us; besides how could one talk on so interesting a subject while playing sellette or Monsieur le cure? I had hoped to be more at my ease with her in the morning, but the aunt was always there and often one of her acquaintances. I could not see Pélagie for a moment alone, it was impossible to have a consecutive conversation with her, and I was beginning to be impatient about it. Before marrying it seemed to me only natural to make the acquaintance of one's future wife. This provincial ceremony seemed to me out of all reason and I should have liked to have sent it to the devil, so I appealed to my sister to obtain an interview for me with my future wife.

"Amélie, I should very much like to have a little talk with Pélagie."

"Well, what prevents you, my dear? Don't you see her every evening and every morning?"

"Yes, of course I do see her every morning, but always in the presence of her aunt and three or four old women, who deprive one of all desire to talk on the subject of love; besides, Pélagie is very timid. How do you think that she can express her feelings before everybody?"

"Why, my dear, you ought easily to divine what she feels by the little words which she allows to escape her."

"My dearest sister, at the point where we now are I am not contented with little words; I want something positive, in fact, I want to know where I stand."

"Why, they let you talk very freely, it seems to me."

"Oh, yes, no doubt it's all delightful; but I repeat that it is not enough for me."

"In the evening you always sit beside her, you can speak low and squeeze her hand."

"My poor Amélie, your little provincial favors make me laugh — one can obtain a good deal more in Paris from young persons whom one is not going to marry."

"So much the worse for the young ladies of Paris, my brother."

"So much the worse, or so much the better, for excessive severity often frustrates its own object; when virtuous principles are once engraven on a young girl's soul, I do not see why she should be refused a little sweet liberty. Those who commit indiscretions would surely have committed them later on; but those who always conduct themselves well and do not abuse their privilege of listening to flowers of speech, these, dear Amélie, give, by the very fact that they are marrying, a guarantee of their virtue, for you can understand that there is no great merit in being innocent when it is impossible to cease to be so."

"My dear brother, what peculiar ideas you

have of women; one can see that you have been spoiled in Paris."

"My dear sister, my ideas on the education of young ladies are much less strict than yours; for instance, I greatly approve the English method which allows young girls the privilege of doing all that they wish before marriage. In London a young lady may go out alone from her parents' house, go to visit her friends and acquaintances; she may go to a concert or a play with a young man without any one supposing because of that that the young man is her lover. She can go to a ball, and when in society may laugh and talk and hold a conversation without being called to order by her parents. But when once she is married everything is different; she must be settled, quiet, and occupied entirely with the care of her household and her children, she never goes out except with her husband, nor receives visits from a man except in his presence, and at fêtes and in assemblies she keeps with the persons of her own sex who, like her, no longer associate with men. And the greater part of the time the ladies leave the gentlemen after dinner to drink their wine and talk on masculine topics. Well, do you think that that way of doing is so bad? I am very sure that less men are deceived in England than in France."

"Pshaw, they are deceived before marriage."

"And here they are deceived after."

"My dear brother."

"Oh, don't get vexed, I wasn't referring to you."

"Well, indeed! what will you say next?"

"I want you to procure a tête-à-tête with Pélagie."

"A tête-à-tête! What are you thinking of?"

"With my future wife; that would be quite correct, quite honorable."

"But for decency's sake and for propriety's sake—"

"Decency and propriety will not be infringed by that."

"But it isn't the custom."

"I am beginning to be very tired of your customs. If you can't get me the interview I ask for I am quite capable of starting off one of these mornings and leaving my intended on your hands as well as her aunt and all the gossips of the town."

"Oh, good heavens! what a heedless fellow you are; you make me tremble. Well, I'll go and try to arrange it; besides it's only a week before you are to be married, and, in fact—Oh, I have an idea. I will go to Madame de Pontchartrain, I shall ask her permission to bring her niece to make the necessary purchases for the marriage, she cannot refuse me; then I shall bring Pélagie here, and you can speak to her at your leisure."

"That's a very good idea."

"But I hope, my dear, that you will be prudent and—"

"Don't be uneasy; you must have a very bad opinion of me."

"As a proof to the contrary, I will go and get your intended."

My sister, in fact, went to Madame de Pontchartrain's. My threat of leaving had made poor Amélie tremble; she would not let me go to Paris to buy the indispensable presents, and Déneterre was charged with that commission. I did not insist, for I might easily have met some one in Paris who would have succeeded in making me forget my marriage.

Amélie was successful with her plans. She returned presently with Pélagie, who blushed when she saw me and curtseyed to me as though I were a stranger.

"Here is my brother, who will be delighted to talk with you," said my sister, making Pélagie come in. "I have a thousand things to do, and I shall be obliged to leave you for a few moments, but as you will be man and wife in a week there can be no great harm in leaving you together."

Amélie departed and at length I was alone with my future wife. Pélagie was seated at a little distance from me and I began by placing my chair beside hers and seizing both her hands. I saw with pleasure that she did not make any effort to withdraw them from mine. For some moments I looked steadfastly at her, but she held down her eyes and did not say a word; I believe if I had not started

the conversation we might have stayed there all day in silence without stirring.

"Mademoiselle, you know, of course, that we are going to marry," I said at last.

"Yes, monsieur."

"In a week I shall be your husband."

"Yes, monsieur."

"Does this please you?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You love me a little, then?"

"Yes, monsieur."

Come, this wasn't going so badly. However, I wanted to obtain something else besides this eternal "Yes, monsieur." I tried to put my questions in such a way as to make her answer less briefly.

"When you saw me the first time did you select me from among the rest? Did you prefer me to the other young men?"

This question, no doubt, seemed embarrassing to her. It was some time before she answered, and then I heard,—

"Yes, monsieur."

"Did you ever like anyone before you saw me?"

"I don't know, monsieur."

"What, you don't mean to say that you have been in love already?"

"Oh, no, monsieur; I don't know anything about love."

"You know now, don't you?"

"No, monsieur."

"You don't love me, then?"

"Why, yes, I do, monsieur."

"But do you love anyone else better than you love me?"

"I don't know, monsieur."

"If they were to marry you to someone else would you be vexed?"

"I don't know, monsieur."

"And why, then, are you going to marry me?"

"I don't know, monsieur."

I almost lost patience. Here was a woman who with her gentleness and docility would make me want to consign her to his Satanic majesty. I began to fear that I had taken stupidity for ingenuousness and awkwardness for timidity; but her hand trembled, no doubt she feared that she had made me angry. I resolved to set this right, I must not frighten her, that would not be the way to please her and gain her confidence.

"Pélagie."

"Monsieur."

"My dearest, when a girl is going to marry anyone she no longer calls him monsieur."

"What must she call him, then?"

"You must say, 'My dear,' I hope I shall always be dear to you."

"Yes, my dear."

"Your aunt has brought you up very strictly?"

"Yes, my dear."

"You don't have any young men visitors at your house?"

"No, my dear."

"Are you fond of society?"

"Yes, my dear."

"When we are married, what shall you do?"

"Everything that will please you, my dear."

"Shall we stay in this town? or shall we go and live in Paris?"

"Why, it's all the same to me; however—"

"Well, come now, don't be afraid to speak."

"I think I should like to live in Paris best."

"That being the case I am delighted to have met you."

I kissed her hand in order to show a little affection; she drew it quickly away.

"Pélagie, a future husband may kiss his future wife's hand as much as he pleases."

"Really."

"I assure you he may."

Immediately she offered me both her hands; she really was delightfully docile, and that is always something.

"Pélagie! what has your aunt said about me?"

"She told me that she would allow me to listen to you."

"And then—"

"That you had asked for my hand, and that she had given it to you."

"Did she not consult with you before doing so?"

"No, my dear, why should she?"

"Why, to find out whether I suited you."

"Oh, that was not worth while."

"But it seems to me that if—"

"I am too well brought up to refuse to obey my aunt."

"But suppose I had been old, ugly, gouty?"

"Why, it would have been just the same."

"Do you mean to say that you would have married me just the same?"

"Of course, if my aunt had wished it."

"Then you have not the slightest inclination towards me?"

"What do you mean by inclination?"

"What, has not your aunt told you that you should love your husband?"

"Oh, yes."

"Be faithful to him?"

"Oh, yes."

"Do everything that he wishes?"

"Oh, yes."

I could stand it no longer, I jumped out of my chair; Pélagie, dismayed, rose also, and looked at me as I strolled about the room.

"Are you not well?" she asked me, opening her big eyes as widely as possible.

I could not refrain from smiling at her question. I put my arms around her and pressed her

tenderly to my breast. I wanted to wake her up a little. At first she tried to disengage herself, but I told her her future husband had the right to press her in his arms.

"Oh, that's different," answered she, and she allowed me to embrace her again.

"He may also kiss you," said I to her. I kissed her several times on her cheeks and on her lips, and she allowed me to do so; a proof of how dangerous ignorance often is. Here was a little innocent that would let one do anything that one wished, and give false reasons for so doing, but I heard my sister coming; I left Pélagie, who had allowed me to kiss her with charming docility; I even think that she began to like it.

"Come," said my sister as she came in, "it is time to go back to your aunt, my dear Pélagie; she may be angry if you are longer absent. You have had plenty of time to talk, and you will have plenty more when you are married. Get your shawl, and let us go."

Pélagie took her shawl without saying anything, and got ready to follow my sister. I said good-by to her, and she looked at me very affectionately. I think those kisses had had some effect upon her heart, and that gave me a little hope for the future.

I saw now that my future wife had no mind, no wit, perhaps, even, I might add something more; but I must console myself for that. I did not think it was necessary to marry a woman of genius

in order to be happy. Women of intellect are usually very tiresome at home, and those who are occupied incessantly in showing off the gifts which they have received from nature rarely think of caring for their children or pleasing their husbands. Directly a wife thinks that she has more mind than her husband, she refuses to be governed by him; besides, I had already had many connections with women of wit and the result had not been happy for me. Agathe, Caroline, Madame de Marsan had all been women with minds. And Nicette? she had good mental qualities also. "But come," thought I, "it is very fortunate that my wife has no mental capacity. I know very well that between a genius and a stupid head there is a great difference, and that if pretentious people are wearisome, foolish ones are still more so; but marriage, which makes so many metamorphoses, will, I hope, form Pélagie's judgment." I already thought that my caresses had moved her. There is a moment when nature seems stupefied, a crisis is then necessary; the heart and mind of Pélagie were perhaps awaiting this crisis to develop them.

CHAPTER VII

I Am Married

The great and presumably happy day had arrived upon which I was to pronounce the solemn "Yes" which should bind me forever to the woman I was supposed to love, and whom I must promise to cherish and protect as long as we both should live. Forever is a long time; all too short, however, when one is happy. Things are not so imperfectly balanced after all.

Owing to certain facts, however, melancholy thoughts came at times to sadden me. In the first place, I was not in love with her I was about to wed, and I felt the lack of that which should have made the ordeal of approaching the altar so easy, so enchanting.

The presence of Love, the little god who fills the present with delight and casts a rose-colored glamour over the future, is necessary on the marriage day; he should always preside over it. However, I was giving him the cold shoulder; I was obliged to do so, forsooth, for I could not find it in my heart to love any woman now. I ought to put Nicette from my thoughts, and yet I was constantly thinking of her. She did not love me, and,

besides, could I marry her? — that would be folly. But is folly that brings one happiness so very blamable?

I felt the tears moisten my eyelids, a rather doubtful way of inaugurating my marriage day. It was the last remembrance given to Nicette. "Hereafter I wish to forget all about her. Come, I must try to be cheerful," said I, "amiable when I am with Pélagie — amiable did I say? she would not perceive whether I were so or no. No matter, let's shake off this melancholy."

My sister was the first to enter my room. I think she perceived my sadness, for she kissed me and folded me in her arms and assured me I should be very happy. I hoped so, indeed. I had not been in love with Pélagie up to the present; perhaps I should be so when we settled in our household.

I overcame my weakness and was myself once more. Poor Amélie, she was pleased when she saw me smile.

By the way, where was I to put up with my wife? I had not given it a thought as yet, nor was I at all uneasy, for my sister had charge of all the arrangements and she was not the woman to forget anything. I should have been pleased, however, to know where I was to take my better half this evening.

"My dear sister, you haven't told me yet where I am to live."

"My dear, that goes without saying."

"Nevertheless, as I can't divine it, it is necessary that you should inform me."

"Has not Madame de Pontchartrain a fine house of which she only occupies a part? You will live there with your wife."

"With the aunt? Oh, I don't like that at all?"

"Don't be uneasy; your apartments are separate and far distant from those of Madame de Pontchartrain, you won't even meet unless you wish. I thought you would prefer to be by yourselves and made all the necessary arrangements."

"Well and good. By the way, has my intended received all the customary presents?"

"Yes, my dear; don't you remember that I showed you the basket yesterday, and that I told you that Déneterre had spent the thousand crowns' worth of stocks you sent him."

"That's true it had quite gone out of my head."

"I assure you that Pélagie will be delighted. There are some magnificent ornaments, and shawls, and materials."

"Very well; I've nothing to do today then, but to get married?"

"Nothing but that, dear."

"Well, so much the better. What hour is set for the ceremony?"

"At eleven o'clock you will go and call for your bride to go to the mairie. We shall have two carriages; I have ordered them."

"Only two carriages! that seems rather mean."

"There are not any more to be hired in the town."

"Why, that makes a difference."

"But for this evening we shall have several sedan chairs and wheel chairs."

"Do they still use those here?"

"Yes, certainly; they are very convenient, and much safer than horse vehicles, of which I am dreadfully timid."

"Well, certainly in a wheel chair one can't go at topmost speed. And from the mairie we shall go to the church?"

"Yes, at one o'clock."

"And after that?"

"Afterwards we shall come back and chat until three o'clock."

"And where are we to have the wedding breakfast?"

"Here, my dear. At first Madame de Pontchartrain wished that we should eat it at her house, but I prevailed on her to have it here. You see we shall feel freer. We can laugh, sing, commit any folly we please."

"I must confess I'm glad you are going to make me commit follies. And the ball's at your house, too, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, my dear, for the ball we shall go to Madame de Pontchartrain's; she has an immense drawing-room, where they can easily form three

quadrilles at a time. Besides, it will be more convenient in the evening to conduct the bride to bed."

"What do you mean by taking the bride to bed?"

"My dear, it's the custom in this part of the country for the nearest relations to take the bride to the nuptial chamber."

"Do me the kindness to abbreviate as much as possible all these ridiculous ceremonies. People should be free to do as they please.

"But my dear brother, decency —"

"Too much 'decency' is often indecent, as on the strength of being considered witty people often say most foolish things. Extremes meet; undue severity leads to debauchery, as extreme strictness in manners often leads to their dissolution. 'Summum jus, summa injuria.' The savages who live in countries where civilized man is not their master ought to have pure morals because they follow the inspirations of nature. Diogenes, who wanted to be wise, was only a fool; and Crates, who believed himself a philosopher, was only disgusting. How many writers are there who wishing to be sublime fall into bathos, and savants who wish to be profound and are only ambiguous, and actors who in trying to be natural are ridiculous, and dancers who in trying to kick too high fall to the ground? I say all this to show that a middle course is best in everything, and that when a mar-

ried couple have satisfied law and religion, decency demands that they should be left to themselves."

"My dear, I'm very sorry about it; but it's the custom."

"By Jove! if I were in love with my bride I would scatter custom to the four winds! But let's say nothing more about it. I'll do anything you like."

"That is very good. Dress yourself and come to breakfast."

I dressed carefully; the least one can do is to look as well as possible on his wedding day. Although Pélagie had told me she would have married me just the same had I been old and ugly, I liked to think that she would perceive the difference. I was ready; a man unless he be fatuous can't be long in dressing, and I did not, like Raymond, reflect for a quarter of an hour where I should place a pin or in what way I should dispose of the ends of my cravat.

Speaking of my neighbor, it was a pity that he could not be at Melun to act as best man at my wedding, he would certainly have invented something new; but probably it would not have turned out well for me and it was much better that he was not there.

My nephews came jumping and gambolling to tell me that breakfast was waiting. They were already decked out for the occasion and were in such high spirits that no one could be heard in the

house. Happy age, where the least novelty, a change from the usual habits, the idea of a feast, a wedding, a big dinner, anything which is out of the usual order and disturbs the routine of every-day life brings joy and transport to the heart. One should keep as long as possible that which pertains to infancy.

I found Déneterre immensely got up; he kissed me, and squeezed my hand almost off as he said to me in a half-grave, half-comical tone, —

"Well, you'll soon be one of us."

I looked at him and smiled, but stifled a sigh that would have been a poor answer to his little compliment.

"Come, let's have something to eat, let's make a good breakfast," said my brother-in-law sitting down to the table. "My dear fellow, you'll need all your strength to-day."

Here was the chapter of jokes commencing; but it would not be a long one in this little town where they did not permit words of double meaning; besides, let them say what they like, I am resolved to bear everything with a good grace. I determined to take Déneterre's advice and eat a good breakfast, it was the best thing I could do.

"We must make haste," said Amélie, "it is almost eleven o'clock; we mustn't make your wife wait, my dear Eugene."

"No, of course not, that would not be fair; but I am ready to start."

"Come, Déneterre, have you finished?"

"Give me time to swallow my breakfast."

"You take so long to do everything. Put the children's hats on."

"What! are you going to take them to the mairie?"

"Certainly."

"It's very foolish; it won't amuse them at all and they'll inconvenience us in the carriage. It's much better to take them only to church."

"But I wish them to go now. Do you suppose I dressed them to leave them in the house?"

"But I tell you we will come and get them presently."

"And I say they shall go now."

"There'll be no room for them."

"You can put them on your knees."

"For them to kick me all the way there, and soil the ladies' dresses."

"They will keep still."

"It'll be something new if they do."

"Ah, you weary me with your arguing."

"It is you who are so stubborn."

Eleven o'clock struck, and I put an end to the discussion by saying I should start; the married couple followed me, leading the little boys. I had been quite sure it would end in that way.

The two carriages were in front of the house. The coachmen had white gloves and big bouquets. All the neighbors were at the doors and windows;

so great an event is a marriage in a small town that it furnishes food for talk for a week. It took us five minutes to go as far as across a small boulevard in Paris; but the horses were not used to carriages and the coachmen went very slowly, so as to look like a procession. We got to our destination, however, and entered the great drawing-room, where were gathered the most intimate and most distinguished persons who had been invited to witness the first ceremony. I did not see my bride and I wanted to go in search of her; but they stopped me, I must not as yet enter the sacred precincts of her chamber.

"She is coming," said Madame de Pontchartrain to me, "restrain yourself, you will shortly see her."

I very easily moderated my transports; I did wish, however, that everything was over and done with; I was getting drunk with all the compliments that everyone was addressing to me, and which I did not know how to answer, for they all said the same thing.

At length Pélagie appeared, led by her aunt and my sister. Her toilet was magnificent and her face even prettier than usual. Everybody admired her and the compliments began again; this time I heard them with more pleasure. The presence of a pretty woman always inspires me, and I was not displeased by the adoration which my bride had called forth.

I hastened to take her hand, she kept her eyes lowered and seemed as though she had made up her mind not to lift them today. I led her towards the door and conducted her to the carriage without listening to her aunt and my sister, who shouted to me, "That's not the way, wait a bit! It is not you who should hand her in, you're disarranging the order."

I did not trouble myself about the order of ceremonies. Madame de Pontchartrain was almost angry, but my sister appeased her by charging my heedlessness to my excessive love. We got into the carriage, which was a matter of some moments because it was who should get first into the vehicle, and who should sit in the back seats. I had to restrain myself not to swear at these cursed ceremonies which kept people for an hour on the carriage step. Poor lovers who get married in the provinces! how much bad blood you must cause. At length everybody was placed. Déneterre was obliged to go on foot with his children, who had already torn the trimming off three ladies' dresses and soiled several white satin shoes. Those little rascals were really very diverting.

We arrived at the mairie. As in the provinces people are not standing in line to get married, we did not have to wait an hour for our turn to arrive. The ceremony was quickly over, we were married according to the law; we had now only to ask the blessing of heaven upon our nuptials.

Before going to the church we were obliged to submit to the same ceremonial relative to the carriages. The procession was still longer than at first, for several persons had joined us at the mairie and three sedan chairs and two wheel chairs had been added to the cortège. My wedding had turned the town upside down, the church was filled with people, you could hardly pierce the crowd to find a passage. Those who were not wedding guests came to criticise us; those who were, came to admire; and the loungers and idlers, the little working girls and mammas to make their comments upon the bride and bridegroom; everyone knows what it is to be at a wedding, for in Paris it is very easy to procure that pleasure; I shall then omit the details of mine, because it was like others as to form. Several times I heard, "What a pretty couple, they are both of them very good-looking." One always likes to hear such things as that.

At length the fatal "Yes" was pronounced, Pélagie said it so low that I could not hear her; as for me, I said it very firmly. They preached us a sermon which was perhaps a little long, but which was very touching, very softening. When one binds himself for life how can he fail to feel some emotion. I had watched Pélagie, she had not wept, her eyes were cast down, her bearing was as reserved and her carriage as modest as possible, but she was not more moved than usual; that vexed me, it seemed to me that she should have wept.

I was married at last. We left the church, passing through a triple rank of curious people, and returned to my sister's house. It took us three-quarters of an hour to go as far as a gun would carry; it is true that the greater part of the town had swollen our cortège and that we had at every moment to reply to bows and curtseys. We were there at last; it was only half-past one, and we did not dine until three. What could be done in the interval? this question was difficult to answer. Some old ladies proposed a game of boston or whist, but Madame de Pontchartrain said they would be wanting in etiquette to play on the morning of a wedding day; it was good form to do nothing. It was enough to amuse one's self in chatting and holding one's self very straight for fear of rumpling one's toilet. Without taking the dear aunt's advice I went into the garden with my wife. I wanted to take her into some solitary part that I might get to know what was in her heart and obtain some inkling of her feeling; but it was impossible to be free, for all the young ladies had followed us; the curious little things would not let us out of their sight. Two young married people are so pleasing to contemplate — when they are pleasing, and you know we were.

I could not do more than take my wife's hand; I pressed it very tenderly, and she looked at me and smiled. Good! she seemed to understand this language.

"You hurt my finger," she said to me very softly, drawing away her hand. It was really very disappointing, I had no further desire to walk alone with her.

Fortunately it was time for the repast, and everybody went very ceremoniously into the dining-room and placed themselves in the order ordained by the convenances. I was at one end of the table, my wife was at the other, it was one way of maintaining the harmony between us.

The greatest order reigned during the first course, everyone sat up very straight and looked at everyone else, passed the dishes, and ate; they all found everything delicious, exquisite, divine, this was almost the only topic of a conversation which I felt no desire to try to enliven; I was serious, pensive even. Sometimes I looked at my wife, her eyes were constantly fixed on her plate. Those of Madame de Pontchartrain depicted the satisfaction she felt in the decent behavior of the newly married pair; certainly, no one could accuse us of looking like two fools.

As I looked at all the guests I perceived that I had at my right a fair young lady, rather pretty and rather cheerful, with whom I had several times laughed and chatted in society, at least as much as it was permissible to laugh in the circles in which we moved. I spoke to her to distract myself, but she now answered me with coldness, reserve, dryness. What was the cause of that? Why, by Jove!

I had forgotten that I was a married man. I still wanted to do the amiable to the young ladies; but I had lost my privileges as a bachelor, which were worth a hundred times more in their eyes than all the gallantries that I could address to them now.

I wished, however, to enliven myself at any cost. I thought I would eat, but I had no appetite; drink, but a bridegroom must keep his equilibrium. At length the second course came, the appetites were a little quieted; jokes and bon-bons and delicate witticisms began to circulate; the young people tried to laugh and the ladies forced themselves to think it droll. My sister was delighted, she did her best to keep up this pleasing gayety. As to Déneterre, he was so busy caring for the table where his boys were seated, with six other children, that he had not time to utter a word.

The dessert and the wines heightened the general hilarity, which was still further augmented by some of my nephews' little tricks; they knocked over two piles of plates, broke three glasses, overturned the sauce on some ladies' dresses in coming to get what was about to be sent them, but which never reached them soon enough to satisfy them. They knew that on such a great occasion as this they had a free hand, and they took advantage of it. Everybody agreed in thinking them very pleasing children, even the ladies who were obliged to change their dresses — their papa and mamma were highly gratified, as was quite natural.

The signal was given, everybody rose from the table.

"What!" said I, in a low tone to my sister, "No singing?"

"My dear, you know well that is no longer good form. Do they sing at grand weddings in Paris?"

"No, but they sing at lively ones."

"We follow the usages of good society here."

"And what about the bride's garter?"

"Fie, that is done away with — it was indecent."

"Oh, that was indecent, was it? Out upon you, my dear Amélie, I don't like all this prudery, it savors of dissimulation."

"Well, you can do as you like after today."

"That's fortunate!"

Poor Amélie! how much she had changed since she had lived in this little country town. This ought to have been a festival, where every one laughed and enjoyed themselves. As for myself I have been at numberless weddings, and I confess that the gayest ones are those of the good people who are not afraid of wounding etiquette and the convenances.

One must live with poor people if one wants to know how to amuse one's self. Today I must content myself by saying in the words of the old song,—

> When I'm a ragged vagabond,
> Then I shall dare to laugh.

My wife had disappeared. She had gone to

dress for the ball. I had nothing to say against this custom. I had nothing to fear from the effects of all the charming toilets. I had turned my back on all the pretty girls. What if they did change their dresses twice — thrice sometimes — that was one of the most pleasing things of this day.

We went to Madame de Pontchartrain's for the ball. This was the first time I had seen the wedding festivities thus divided, but I had learned a good many things on this occasion.

The company went into the drawing-room, which was lighted by lustres that must have served during the time of King Pepin the Short; the persons invited to the ball arrived in crowds, for everyone in that little town was scrupulous in not missing a fête. The bride came back in her ball toilet, which was very tasteful. I looked at Pélagie, but her eyes were always "in statu quo." I ventured to say to her in a low tone,—

"Come, lift your eyes up and let me see them; you have such beautiful eyes."

"My aunt has forbidden me to."

That was all the satisfaction I obtained.

I had nothing to say to that; it would have been ungracious on my part to act the master so soon.

The orchestra began to play; we had two violins and a clarinet, as well as a little fifer to imitate Colinet. They played well, it was the best that could be had about there. They played quadrilles

for us that we had never heard in Paris, and I understood that they were the compositions of the chief of the local orchestra; one could not by any possibility deceive himself into thinking they were by Rubner, Weber or Tolbecque. There were a good many dances, and there at least the pleasure was not feigned, for young people are always and everywhere so very fond of terpsichorean diversion. They disputed who should dance with the bride, who was always engaged in advance for twelve or fifteen quadrilles. The husband's turn never comes, but upon this happy day what would have made him very disconsolate the evening before matters not a whit; is he not her husband? How a mere trifle changes the manner of seeing and feeling.

I also "tripped the light fantastic toe." I was only too delighted to have this resource to occupy me during the to me unnecessarily long drawn out social festivity of my bridal day and I danced as often as my wife.

Towards the end of the evening, however, I danced with Pélagie. The ball had excited her a little, her manner was more animated, there was color in her cheeks, her heart beat more quickly; she was really very pretty and I ought to have esteemed myself very fortunate in possessing so charming a wife.

But it was getting late, a good many people had already gone; it was one o'clock in the morning.

Madame de Pontchartrain made a sign to my sister and they led my wife away. I understood what this meant and I waited until they permitted me to rejoin Pélagie.

At last everybody had gone and Amélie returned and signed to me that I might retire also, so I left the ballroom and directed my steps towards that part of the building in which I was hereafter to live. I had previously taken the precaution to have some one show me the way to my bedroom and I took care to take a light, for I did not want to break my neck in the crooked passages of this old mansion; this moment would be ill-chosen to take a fall. Ah, I perceived a light; it must be there, I put my hand on the knob of the door — but here I will leave my dear readers and draw a curtain before the mysteries of Hymen.

CHAPTER VIII

Return to Paris. Raymond Re-appears

The first days of marriage are usually passed in a charming seclusion, and the sweet-sounding name of honeymoon is given to the first month of married life; instead of the traditional honey of that felicitous period, I had, on the day after my nuptials, a bitter quarrel with my wife's aunt, Madame de Ponchartrain, who, with amazing stupidity still wished to act the part of duenna to her niece, being seemingly oblivious to the fact that a wife is subject only to her husband, and that he has rights which a third person cannot possibly interfere with.

The patience of a cherubim would have been necessary to enable me to put up with her ridiculously nonsensical pretensions and her overbearing manners, and as, I must needs confess, I am anything but an angel and felt obliged to assert myself and assume my lawful authority at the outset, I gave the aunt her walking ticket and emphatically forbade her to meddle in any way with the affairs of my household in the future; and I most particularly enjoined her from giving her niece any advice whatever. Madame de Pontchartrain

shouted, fumed, and raged, and I withdrew to my apartment and so a breach was made between us.

Old women are apt to be gossipy and our aunt was also malicious and vindictive. Instead of trying to forget this scene she thought only of avenging herself for what she called my ungentlemanly behavior, and the next day everybody in the town knew that I was a hot-tempered, unmanly libertine, and that I was already making my wife very unhappy.

However, my sister, who loved me and understood me, hastened to deny the reports which the old aunt set in motion against me; she broke with Madame de Pontchartrain, because she could not see things from the latter's point of view.

In the town some of them believed my aunt, and others my sister; opinions were divided, and this would have given rise to two distinct factions had not all parties been in accord on one point — the pleasure of talking and the love of scandal.

I did not trouble myself much about what the inhabitants of Melun thought or said, but occupied myself with my wife, for I was determined that she should not share her aunt's opinions.

Pélagie found herself in a very embarrassing position; her aunt told her not to listen to me, and I told her not to listen to her aunt; the latter constantly sought to entice the young bride to her house, and I did my best to keep her away from there as much as possible.

Madame de Pontchartrain told my wife that she ought to command our household and make herself obeyed, be the mistress, in fact, and I tried to make Pélagie understand that when a woman as yet knows only how to play at little games, dance, embroider and sing ballads, she must have her husband's assistance in conducting her household.

All this often threw my wife into the greatest incertitude, for whereas I had only been her husband for a few days, her aunt had always governed and directed her. She feared her aunt, and I should have been very sorry to have inspired her with a similar feeling. Thenceforth she obeyed her aunt rather than me, which had already brought about between us one of those little discussions which I desired to avoid. If Pélagie had had more mind and a little judgment she would have felt that her aunt was wrong; but, alas, she possessed neither wit nor judgment. Stupid people are often more difficult to lead than clever ones. I had hoped that married life and association with a masculine mind would have broadened her views and rendered her more pliant, but I was beginning to lose all hope of this.

I had no desire to remain at Melun; but before taking my wife to Paris I must have an abode made ready for her; I could not take her to my bachelor's apartment, that would be unsuitable for us, nor did I wish that she should be acquainted with it.

I should have to stay a week at Paris to find a suitable apartment, have it furnished and put in order, hire and settle the servants; and if I left my wife for a week in her aunt's power, God alone knew how I should find her disposed towards me on my return. An hour passed with Madame de Pontchartrain always led to a quarrel between Pélagie and me. When she left her aunt, who had fully convinced her that she should pay no heed to me, she would try to do everything contrary to what I said and to torment me and put me in a bad temper, and I had much trouble in bringing her round to other ideas and making her see that she was wrong. If she were a week away from me there would be no way of living together.

But what was I to do? However, I could not stay any longer in the country, for I was heartily sick of provincial life, and felt if I had to live there I should also soon die there.

My sister perceivèd my quandary, and despite her desire to settle me near her, seeing that I tasted little of the felicity of married life at Melun, she offered to send Déneterre to Paris to make the necessary preparations for our living there. I gratefully accepted her offer, and my brother-in-law left charged with my instructions.

I hoped his return would be speedy, for the time seemed terribly long to me. I dared not leave my wife, and to be constantly with one who has nothing to say and who often did not understand

what I said to her was torture. Now I felt that beauty is a mere trifle. One may get used to everything, to an ugly face as well as a pretty one; but if with that charming face there is no mind, no wit, when a tiny mouth is mute, or babbles mere foolishness, when big eyes have no expression, when the smile is always the same, when the voice is devoid of feeling, then one can only yawn and sleep beside that little masterpiece of nature.

But in listening to an agreeable person who knows how to express what she feels, whose eyes and whose voice are eloquent, who charms us by her thought and holds us by her conversation, does one notice her plainness? No, it is forgotten, or, better still, it disappears from our sight and we think the face agreeable that at first failed to please.

> A woman who has wit and ease
> How can she be too plain to please?

No doubt beauty blended with wit is even more attractive, but when one can only have one of the two in marrying, one should surely not be too much taken by the mere outside. When one has a flirtation, simple or serious, with a pretty woman, he does not trouble himself as to what she knows or says; and that is quite natural, because one drops her as soon as he is tired of the game. But a wife with whom one must live for the rest of his days is a very different thing. I know some husbands are less often in the company of their wives

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She watched her niece like a cat watching a mouse.

PHOTOGRAVURE FROM ORIGINAL DRAWING BY G. A. WILLIAMS.

than in that of their casual women acquaintances, but it was not of them that I was speaking. In marrying I had intended to form a model household, and not to leave my wife to run here and there; you will see, however, that I was obliged to do differently to what I intended.

It was twelve days since Déneterre left, and he had not yet returned. Madame de Pontchartrain, who was aware that I was taking her niece to Paris, was more nervous than ever; she tried each day to play me some new trick; she watched her niece like a cat watching a mouse, and whenever she had the opportunity she showed her spite against me. The frustration of her little plots occupied all my time; it was open war in the house.

By continually backbiting me the old aunt had made people believe a part of her calumnies; so that when I went to a party, which happened only occasionally, I heard a confused murmur, a continual whispering which arose on my entrance. Some looked at me and others turned away.

Those old dowagers and the matrons who were Madame de Pontchartrain's warm friends shunned me like the plague.

I laughed at all these with some of the more reasonable and well-disposed people, but they were not in the majority; besides, it is much easier to talk ill than well of any one, it seems as though our faults leap to the surface while our good qualities remain hidden.

At length Déneterre returned, my apartments awaited me on the Boulevard Montmartre, ready for me to live in; everything was in order to receive my wife and I; our servants were settled.

We did not tarry in making our preparations. I hurried Pélagie with her trunks, her packages and her bonnet boxes. She seconded my efforts kindly enough, and I felt sure that in the depths of her heart she was not sorry to be delivered from her aunt's authority, or to see the world, and what a world! — Paris, the paradise of women and the sheol of — Good God! I had forgotten I was one of them!

At length, all our preparations being finished, I said good-by to my sister, to her husband, to my nephews.

Pelagie went to say good-by to her aunt, for she could not be lacking in politeness. Madame de Pontchartrain did not wish to let her niece leave her, and I necessarily had to go in search of her; she asserted that I had not the right to take her away — she wanted to retain her by force, so I was obliged to abduct my wife. The old aunt pursued us up to the street door and threatened to come and find me in Paris, but she was not likely to do that, for they don't play boston in the morning in Paris.

At last we were on our way, and in my joy I kissed my wife. We had been married exactly six weeks and it was five months since I had left Paris.

I was about to see that brilliant city again and I exclaimed,—

"I greet thee! city of noise, of mud and of smoke!

I prefer your noise to the cackling of a provincial place, your mud to the grass which grows in the unfrequented streets of a country town, and your smoke to the solid pleasures which I have not found elsewhere."

We were soon installed in our new abode; it was large, commodious, and well laid out. I perceived that there was a bedroom off my dressing-room, where I could easily have a bed made up in case my wife was indisposed or wished to be alone.

We had two servants, a housemaid and a cook, which were all that was necessary, for I had neither horses nor intrigues and consequently had no need of either a Frontin or a Safleur, who having nothing to do in my house would be obliged to empty my cellar, flirt with my maids, and steal from me to pass the time.

For the first fortnight after my return to Paris my wife did not leave me a moment's rest; I must take her everywhere, to the promenades, to plays, to see the monuments and curiosities of all kinds. She obliged me to trot all over the place every morning, for she wanted to know every quarter; she was never tired of admiring the Palais-Royal and of stopping for half an hour at a time before the shops to look at the fashions, the cashmere

shawls, the novelties. She was in a whirl of delight, of amazement.

The throngs of people, the rattle and roar of the city, the carriages, the toilets, and the young dandies who on the promenades or at the theatres gazed so respectfully at the women, and looked so agreeably at those who pleased them — all this delighted Madame Dorsan, who began to raise her eyes and even to fling innocent little glances. As to the last, I had been sure that would come about.

I knew Paris, I knew it by heart, and I was rather tired of running about it every day; but a married man must, of course, show some disposition to oblige his wife.

Thank heaven we had at last nothing more to see, unless we began all over again, which my wife would not be long in doing; but I needed some rest. Besides, she saw that in Paris a young woman may safely go about alone in the morning if she wishes. She knew our neighborhood very well already and I saw that she would profit by the liberty I accorded her.

I could breathe freely at last. I was really tired of sightseeing, walking, and questions, and I was glad to be alone. I had not as yet had time to go to my little apartment in the Rue Saint-Florentin. If my wife knew that I had a bachelor's apartment, if her aunt should learn it, I should be convicted of having clandestine intrigues. However, this was not my desire; far from wishing to take women

to my old lodging, I wished I had never taken any of them there.

There was one place which I desired and which I feared to pass. In traversing Paris with my wife I had studiously avoided it. And wherefore? I hardly knew why, but I wished first to go there alone; I should then be free to stop there if I wished. I should look for my messenger and I could — but no, I determined to question him no further; what need had I now of interrogating him?

My wife was asleep; it was not eight o'clock and we did not breakfast until ten; I had time to go out for a few moments. I wanted to go to my lodging and it was towards that that I directed my steps, but it was in that direction also that Nicette lived. In passing through the Rue Saint-Honoré I could not resist the secret feeling which led me towards the flower shop; at first I walked very quickly, but as I drew nearer I slackened my pace. I did not wish to go in, I did not wish to speak to her — but I wanted to see her.

I could see the small shrubs in front of the shop; I crossed the street so as not to be on the same side as her dwelling. If I passed too near she might speak to me, and at her voice I should have to stop, despite myself.

I decided at length upon my course; I would pass very quickly and just glance in as I went by; but I did not see her. Instead, I saw a woman with

a common face, who did not resemble Nicette in the least. Then I went right up to the shop and passed close beside it — she was not there. I returned again; I stopped, feigning to examine the flowers, and the woman came towards me,—

"Does monsieur wish to buy something?"

"No, no," said I, departing, and I went to the messenger's seat, thinking to question him, but he was not there; I waited for nearly an hour, and at length he arrived and recognized me immediately.

"Your servant, monsieur; if I'd known you were here I'd have come sooner. It's been a long time since I saw you, monsieur."

"That is true, and what has happened since then?"

"Why, hang it! there's been quite a change down there — the pretty flower-girl doesn't keep that shop any longer."

"She doesn't keep it now?"

"No, monsieur, she sold her stock and good-will to Mother Thomas, whom you see in her place."

"She has sold it?"

"Yes, monsieur, and sold it well; for the shop's a good one — but they say Mademoiselle Nicette doesn't need it now, that she has made a fortune — inherited one, I mean."

"And where is she now?"

"Faith, monsieur, I don't know; she didn't say where she was going, and we never see her now."

"And what of the man who used to go to see her every day?"

"Hang it, he kept on coming, but less often towards the end."

"Can he have abducted her?"

"I don't know anything about it, monsieur. It seemed, however, that she sold her stock of her own free will."

"How long ago was that?"

"Why, nearly six weeks."

"And you don't know in what direction she has gone?"

"No, monsieur."

I tipped the messenger and departed; it was useless to question him further — Nicette had left her shop — What had become of her? what was she doing? — Was she living with Raymond? That did not seem possible to me.

Could he have let his apartment? I did not know what to think, and I hurried to the Rue Florentin.

My portress uttered an exclamation of surprise on seeing me.

"Well, here you are, monsieur, we really thought you were dead. Do you know you've been gone six months?"

"I know that, Madame Dupont. Give me my keys, if you please."

"In a moment, monsieur; in a moment. I've taken good care of your apartment; I've had your

furniture beaten every month — I've cleaned, I've —"

"Oh, I'm quite easy on that point. But tell me, does M. Raymond still occupy his room on that floor?"

"No, monsieur, no. He's left and we have some one else in his place."

"Do you know his address?"

"Yes, monsieur, he left it; he lives now in the Rue Pinon near the Opera, number — Good heavens! I've forgotten, but it will come back to me. Here are your keys, monsieur."

"What about the number, Madame Dupont?"

"It's strange that I don't remember it, I knew it well enough the other day. But the street isn't long."

"That's extremely fortunate."

"Ah, wait! I was going to forget it, I've a letter for you; it came six weeks ago."

"A letter?"

"Yes, it was brought by a young woman."

"A woman! well, why don't you give it to me?"

"Here it is, monsieur."

I took the letter and hastily went up to my apartment, in order to avoid the portress' gossip. Here I was in this dear lodging — what pleasure I experienced in being here once more. But there was the letter to be read. That writing, it seemed to me, I knew, but I dared not hope. I

broke the seal; it was she, it was Nicette who had written it.

Monsieur: — For a long time past you have not come to see me and I cannot think why you have ceased to visit me; you seemed to be angry with me the last time you spoke to me, and I thought you were vexed with me, though I knew no reason why you should be. Today I learn that you are married. I understand that you ought not to think of me or to speak to a flower-girl; but I thought I would write to you and say good-by. I am going to sell my shop and retire to a place where I can be alone, see no one, and weep freely, for I have a deep sorrow which I cannot overcome — I am not to blame for it. I have inherited a good deal from my mother and an aunt who left me all her property, so I have more than enough to live on. But I do not forget that I owe you all, that you had pity on me when everyone else abandoned me, that you saved me from poverty. Oh, I shall never forget that! Good-by, monsieur, I wish you all sorts of happiness in your household; may your wife make you happy. She must love you deeply.

Good-by, my dear benefactor,

Nicette.

I re-read this letter several times and I could not refrain from pressing my lips on the characters traced by her hand. Was this the language of an unfaithful woman? However, I had seen with my own eyes Raymond beside her holding her hands. I knew that she saw him every day, he himself had told me so; but could I place any faith in what Raymond said? Oh, if only I had not seen him with her! But should I torment myself thus? I reflected. Is she not lost to me forever? Am I not married? I did not dream

of being unfaithful to my wife, but I did so long to know if Nicette loved me. I would discover Raymond's whereabouts and get him to speak, that would not be difficult; but to get him to speak the truth would not be so easy.

It was late and my wife would be getting uneasy at my absence, I must go back to her; but I should return here, I should come back often.

I carefully folded Nicette's letter, and carried it with me as I left my bachelor apartment to go back to my household.

Who could have told Nicette that I was married? My portress did not know it or she would surely have spoken to me of it. It was Raymond, without doubt, but how could he have learned it? I was reflecting thus as I approached my dwelling when someone slapped me on the shoulder; I turned and beheld Raymond. Never, I confess, had the sight of him given me so much pleasure.

"Well, here you are at last, my dear fellow."

"Good-day, M. Raymond."

"You are in Paris now, it seems?"

"As you see."

"My dear Dorsan, it seems to me it's a century since I last saw you."

"I also am pleased to see you, I assure you."

"Really, my good friend! By the way, accept my congratulations. I know that you have made a splendid marriage, that you have a divine wife."

"Oh, you know that, do you?"

"Yes, one of my friends who had been staying at Melun told me all about it — you met him in society — M. Regnier."

"Ah, I fancy I remember him."

"Well, it was he who told me all about it. Why, I was almost vexed with you; I said: 'What! my dear Dorsan, my friend, is married and didn't let me know it, I who was so much interested in his happiness; it's too bad of him!'"

"You are really too kind, but my wife is expecting me and I cannot stay longer. I should like to chat with you very much, though; will you breakfast with me?"

"Will I, indeed?"

"I will present you to my wife."

"I shall be delighted to make her acquaintance."

Raymond accompanied me home, appearing delighted at the unusually cordial welcome I had accorded him. He had no suspicion that I wished to speak with him merely because he alone could tell me anything about Nicette — perhaps could tell me where she was and what she was doing now. I resolved to be prudent, however, and not question him too suddenly, lest he should divine my feeling, which I must now more than ever keep hid in the depths of my heart.

We arrived at my house. My wife was not uneasy about me, for she was breakfasting. I presented Raymond, who overwhelmed her with compliments and gallantries and eulogies, which

must have bored Pélagie; but mindless women always value compliments highly, with them one may make quite a good impression with a few commonplaces, and of these Raymond had a large fund.

The conversation then turned on the agreeability of Paris as a place of residence and the sensation which a wife like mine ought to produce in society; for Raymond always came back to that. He could not understand how any one from the country could be so pretty and have such a distinguished appearance; he dwelt on it at length, but I heard him without listening to him. As to Pélagie, as she had now learned that a woman can smile at another man beside her husband, so she now smiled at Raymond's compliments, which gave her an opportunity of showing her teeth.

I saw that it was impossible for me to speak of Nicette to him this morning, as my wife was still there. I must have patience.

"Where do you live?" I asked him.

"Rue Pinon No. 2; I've left my old lodging. You were no longer my neighbor, and it had lost all its old charm."

"I wish to go and see you."

"Oh, don't trouble yourself to do that! a bachelor is seldom at home; I will come here, if you will allow it, and pay my respects sometimes to madame."

"It will give me much pleasure to see you."

"But I must leave you now. I have so many acquaintances that I have not a moment to myself. Good-by, my dear fellow. Madame, I lay at your feet the homage which your beauty merits."

Raymond went off highly delighted at this last compliment. He was not a whit altered.

"This gentleman is very pleasant," said Pélagie, when he had gone.

She thought him charming, I was sure she would. That my wife should think Raymond amiable did not surprise me! but Nicette?

I dared not go to Raymond's on the same day, but on the morrow I repaired to his lodging. He was not in, he had already gone out.

"Does he live alone here?" I asked the porter.

"Yes, monsieur, all alone."

I departed; I should much have liked to learn something further; however, I was almost assured on one point — Nicette did not live with him.

I left my name with the porter, that Raymond might know I had been to see him; that would invite him to come to my house, and I should perhaps be able to talk with him for a few moments alone.

He came, in fact, the next day. He was extraordinarily sensible of the honor I had done him in calling on him, and promised to show his attachment for me by coming to see me often.

I paid scarcely any attention to all the pretty things that he said to me; what made me very

impatient was that my wife remained with us. How should I find an opportunity of speaking of Nicette.

Confound it! I would ask Raymond to dinner. I would propose that we should spend an evening at the theatre, my wife would go to dress after dinner; she was always three-quarters of an hour at least at her toilet, and during that time we would talk — the very thing!

I invited Raymond to dine without ceremony with us; he seized my hand and almost killed me, he squeezed it so tightly in the fervor of his satisfaction at my suggestion, and I saw by the expression of his eyes that he would not fail to come. He must certainly have found me considerably changed. No doubt he thought it was the effect of marriage.

The dinner passed off cheerfully enough. Raymond did all the talking, but what sometimes bored me today distracted me; I was not in the mood to talk and I was glad to have a third person present to prevent my being tête-à-tête with my wife.

Everything went off as I had foreseen. I proposed that we should go to the theatre; my wife went up to dress, and I was alone with Raymond.

I insensibly led the conversation to the matter of conquests.

"By the way," I said to him, "what have you done with the little flower-girl?"

"Which one do you mean, little Nicette?"

"Yes, little Nicette, whom you used to go and court every evening."

"Oh, that's all been done with for a long time past, and I had about forgotten her. I have had so many other little affairs of the kind since."

"Why you don't mean to say she was your mistress."

"Yes, for three or four days, and then I left her."

"And you didn't see her again?"

"Never, I don't even know where she is, for she has left her shop — no doubt to do something better; that little girl was ridiculously ambitious, she wanted to play the lady, and that bored me; one can't be expected to see a fine lady in a little flower-girl, one must keep to his own class. Oh, by the way, talk about fine ladies, there's your wife, she really is a beauty, and she is so very pleasant too; she sparkles with wit. I saw that from the very first. By Jove, what a lucky fellow you are!"

Since he had spoken of my wife I had not listened to what he said; I was thinking of what he had told me of Nicette; he assured me that he had been intimate with her, but could it be true? Oh, if I had not seen her with him I should have rejected this idea as a frightful insult to her. But it seemed impossible to learn what had become of her, I should never see her again.

This saddened me, and I could not put it from me. My wife came back; she had completed her toilet. Raymond offered her his arm, I signed to Pélagie to take it, since it is not the custom here for a wife to take her husband's arm when another cavalier is present. Oh, if I were in love with my wife, I should mock at these customs; but on the contrary, I am now delighted to go by myself, that I may yield to my revery.

Raymond was delighted to offer his arm to a pretty woman who thought everything he said charming. He came to the play with us, and undertook to keep up the conversation solus.

I did what I could to make the evening pleasant and to distract myself; but do what I would I fell a prey to my memories. Fortunately they did not perceive it; my wife was amused by the play and by Raymond, and the latter was in a state of ecstacy at what he himself said and what Pélagie said to him.

The play was done and everyone was going home. Ah, how I should have liked to have a separate room, but I dared not propose it.

What I had heard during the day had thrown me into a despondency I could not overcome. My wife said nothing, but I am sure she thought Raymond a far more amiable being than myself. Ah, how foolish a man is to form an indissoluble tie with a woman who does not feel and think as he does. I said this to myself every day, and

every day I stayed less and less with my wife. I left her to amuse herself with Raymond's conversation and I went to indulge in revery in my little bachelor's apartment; I often read and wrote and worked there; I was so comfortable then, and I reverted to happier days — to those when I had been wont to find bouquets of orange blossoms in my keyhole.

Oh, how happy I ought to have been then. It is now, when those moments are forever gone, that I feel the real value of them, and it is when I leave my little lodging to return to my household that I regret them most keenly.

CHAPTER IX

I Should Have Foreseen It. My Neighbor. Great Events. End of Neighbor Raymond

It matters not how gay or gloomy, contented or complaining, rich or poor we may be, Fate spins the threads for the shuttle of our lives. Mine were no longer tissues of gold or of silk; time passed, as it always passes whether we be happy or unhappy, but to me it seemed interminably slow, for I, alas, was far from happy; this was all the difference, and in this fact people who are attached to life could find a compensation, for the sorrowful years stretch out to twice their length.

I had been married barely a year and I had already acquired the manners of an old married man. It was no longer necessary for me to escort my wife in the morning, for she now knew Paris as well as I did and neither needed or desired that I should squire her. She went out and about freely to make calls, to do shopping, or to walk on the fashionable promenades with some of her acquaintances; while I worked at home or went my own way like a veritable old sobersides. We almost always had some one to dinner and very

often this some one was Raymond, who was the tame cat of the establishment. Not that I regarded him with any greater friendship than of yore. No, I looked upon him as anything but a friend, but he was necessary to me, he drew me out of myself; he was company for my wife, he was always at our command if we needed him for some excursion or to do some commission. He really was extremely obliging, and, last but not least, as he had known Nicette he was the only one with whom I could sometimes talk of her, a sufficient reason for my seeking his society. Nevertheless it was to him that I owed a part of my trouble; but, at the same time, in causing me to estimate Nicette at her true value he had also done me a service; if she had listened to him she must have listened to a good many others; in fact, though his presence was painful to me I sought him at every chance. I still hoped that he had lied to me in what he had told me about her.

As to my wife she could not get along without Raymond, and he was with her almost every evening while I went to my little apartments. Raymond played the flute a little and my wife played the piano, so they accompanied each other and also sang together. Raymond was a bad musician and my wife never played in time, but they had an idea that they did very well together. To cap it all, Raymond had a stock of compliments and laudatory and gallant speeches which delighted my

wife, who had a good deal of self-conceit and coquetry, and was very fond of hearing that she turned everybody's head and was extremely witty.

I confess that I never could have told my wife that she was witty, and for a long time past I had ceased to tell her that she was pretty, for it seemed to me superfluous to do so. I had told her so when I was paying court to her, and I could not always keep saying the same things. Such conversation seemed very futile to me; there is no need of compliments between married people to prove their affection; but Pélagie, who did not know how to converse on any interesting subject, was very proficient in the art of smiling at a compliment, and Raymond asserted that her smile said many things. As to me, I wanted to talk reasonably to her and she yawned; I left her, then, very happy when Raymond came to take my place.

I was perhaps wrong to leave my wife to do as she pleased, but how could it have helped had I constrained her tastes and her desires? It would only have made us both unhappy. We had married without love and we were not born to live together; my wife was bored when she was alone with me, nor did I find her amusing. When I wished to talk reasonably to her and ask her to occupy herself a little more with her household and its management, instead of thinking of nothing but dress, pleasure and gewgaws, Pélagie wept and asserted that her aunt was right in calling me

a tyrant. What could I answer to that? — Nothing; I cannot bear to see a woman cry, and if I did not love my wife I wished that she should have no reasons to complain of my treatment; I therefore allowed her to buy everything that she pleased, to go to the balls and parties to which she was invited. Pélagie spent in dress and ornaments, carriages and other items, a good deal more than she had brought me, but I held my tongue about it to avoid little "discussions." I wanted at least to try to keep the peace.

I ought perhaps to have been with her more often and not have left her to listen to the idle small talk of the dandies and the sweet nothings of the roués of the drawing-room, but really it was impossible for me to be jealous. Besides, I rested quietly in the knowledge that Pélagie had been very strictly brought up, that she had good principles and a regard for the conventions and the proprieties, that she was modest and pure. It is true that she no longer kept her eyes lowered and that she was even rather coquettish; still, I felt quite assured of her fidelity; after all, the young men who paid her court in society did not come to my house, I hardly received a single man except Raymond; in short, if one were to torment himself in looking for trouble in advance one would never be at ease.

I had hoped to have children, I should have loved them very much and have taken pleasure

in superintending their education, but up to the present I had not this satisfaction. My sweetest solace still was to go and shut myself up in my little apartment in the Rue Saint Florentin; there I was another being, almost believing that I was a bachelor again. In that house no one knew that I was married; however, I never slept there and my portress must have thought my manner of living very peculiar, but I paid her generously and she never permitted herself the slightest reflection. Besides, she had no complaint to make of me in the house; I never took anybody there, I never made the slightest noise, I spoke only when necessary, and since Raymond was no longer my neighbor I did not even know who lodged on the same floor with me.

For some time past my wife had been going more than ever to those balls and parties which kept her out until far into the night. I am not averse to pleasure, but I thought the abuse of it was injuring her health. I reproached her for it several times, and she answered me bitterly; a discussion arose and madame, who had taken a tone which I had never heard from her before, and which surprised me in a woman whom I had always found so timid and modest as Pélagie, wound up by announcing that she wished to have a separate apartment, that she might be more free to do as she pleased.

Nothing could have suited me better. I had

a bed placed in the room adjoining my dressing-room and which was separated from my wife's room by the drawing-room, antechamber, and the music-room. On the very evening that I took possession of my lodging, Raymond, who saw this new arrangement, said that it was very well contrived and we had only lacked that to make a delightful household.

Pélagie spent a considerable amount of money; in order to put a curb on the folly she was beginning to commit I accompanied her into society; it would still have been easy enough for me to have had intrigues, to make conquests, for a young husband in Paris is accorded as kind a welcome as a bachelor in the provinces, but I had no longer any leaning towards those transitory connections with women who do not occupy the heart, and I was a faithful husband, though not a loving one.

Raymond also was extremely faithful in the friendship he professed for us, and was often obliging enough to bring my wife home when I did not care to stay so late as she, and as we did not occupy the same apartment Madame Dorsan could come in as late as she pleased without my knowing it. I said nothing further to her, for I saw that she constantly did exactly opposite to what I bade her.

I feared, however, that her chest, which was delicate, would suffer from this continual dissipation. Upon the next day she was to go to yet

another ball and I had advised her to remain at home, but she would not listen to me. I accompanied her and I tried to get her to come home early. Raymond had gone with us to this party, which was a very brilliant and numerous assemblage. At midnight, surfeited with dust and écarté, I asked my wife to come home with me.

"Me, monsieur," answered Pélagie, "do you think I am going to leave just at the most agreeable time of the evening? I intend to remain until the end; you can go home and go to bed, M. Raymond will escort me."

What could one say to a woman who appeared so determined? I drew near Raymond, and he hastened himself to meet my wishes.

"My dear fellow, if you are tired, go home; I will take care of madame."

"Will you? Oh, very well, you will do me a great kindness."

I went home and I went to bed; I slept almost three hours and I don't know what caused me to awaken, but no doubt it was written in the book of fate that I should awaken. I sounded my repeater — three o'clock. I should have liked to know if my wife had come in. Ordinarily I was not uneasy about that, but today her cold had made me fearful for her health. If she did not take care of herself it might become grave, and although I was not in love with her, I was wiser than she and it was for me to watch over her welfare.

This idea prevented me from going to sleep again; it seemed to me that I should be easier when I knew that she had come in. But what prevented me from going to assure myself that she had? I had never done so since we had had separate rooms, but my solicitude on this occasion should not vex her, and besides I could go to her without waking her up, she would not even know that I had been there. I had a double key to her door, which I had had made when we shared the same room that I might go in without waking her up, for in the commencement of our marriage she had gone to bed before I got in and shut herself up because she was timid. I had forgotten to return this key to her and she had probably forgotten that I possessed it, so it remained in my desk.

I arose and groped about, for I did not keep a light burning at night. I looked for the key in my secretary, and I found it and left my room softly to go to that of my wife. I walked cautiously through the rooms which separated us, any one would have thought that I was a lover going to his mistress. However, this was quite a different matter. At length I reached my wife's room and saw a light there. "Good," I said to myself, "she has come in." I was on the point of taking my departure when I thought I heard somebody speak. With whom could she be talking? The servants were always in bed when we came in, we had our own keys; I listened,

I could not distinguish the sounds very well; however, it seemed to me that I knew that voice! The deuce, thought I, that is very singular. A thousand ideas rushed into my mind, I softly slipped the key into the lock and suddenly turned it twice, I entered and I saw — Raymond in my wife's room.

Surprise for a moment rendered me motionless. Raymond had jumped out of bed and was running around the room like a madman, he could not find the door, although there were two in the apartment. I came to myself, and I could not help applying a kick to his person which threw him over on to the floor, though I immediately repented my imprudence; what was the use of making a noise, a scandal, so that everybody in the house should know what was going on? Indeed, that only was lacking to me. I picked Raymond up, pushed him outside and threw his clothes in his face; I even showed him light, that he should not break his neck on the staircase, it was impossible for me to be more polite than I was. "Tomorrow?" said I to him. I don't think he heard me; but no matter, he was gone and I returned to my wife.

She was still in bed, she had not stirred.

"You see," I said, "that I do not wish to spread all this abroad. However, madame, I am not in the humor to remain with you; I am quite willing to hide your misconduct, but I will not be a wit-

ness of it. Hereafter we will live apart, since it is no longer possible to get a divorce and people must remain in their marriage bonds during life by the law,[1] even when they are no longer under them in feeling. The wrong will perhaps be attributed to me, they will say that I have abandoned you after making you unhappy; it is thus that people often judge of the actions of others, but it matters little. I leave you everything that is here; you have your fortune, I have mine; let us hereafter have nothing in common between us." Pélagie did not answer me a word, it almost seemed to me that she had gone to sleep while I was speaking. I took the candle, closed the door, and went back to my own room; I wanted to go to bed again, but I felt that I could not sleep; although one may not be in love, and may not be jealous, there are some things which one cannot see in cold blood. However, I was well enough pleased with what I had done. With the exception of the kick which I had given Raymond I had conducted myself like a true philosopher; but in the depths of my heart I felt that one can never be a philosopher if he hold to his self-respect, to honor! — To honor! Ah, Figaro was very right. What the devil would he have done in my place?

I would pack my things, that would afford me

[1] Divorce in France was not only possible but ridiculously easy, from the Revolution until the Restoration in 1816, when almost the first act of the new government was to declare marriage indissoluble, and it so remained up to a few years ago, when a divorce law was passed.

occupation. I could then carry everything away as soon as it was daylight, and leave forever the woman whom I had married hardly eighteen months ago, and who had already made me a — one does not like to write that word when it concerns himself, though one is ready enough to apply it to others.

"So this is the result of this exceedingly happy marriage," I mused. "Oh, my dear sister, why did I listen to you? why did I marry a woman who did not love me—a woman who did not know me, in fact? Had we lived comfortably together, had I been better pleased with her company, had I left her less to herself, perhaps this would not have happened; but in any case this young innocent, this simple little maiden had betrayed me at the end of eighteen months. Pshaw, how do I know? perhaps had betrayed me long before that; and it is Raymond again who — but I should have foreseen this, it was to happen. Ah, this will be your last trick, M. Raymond? tomorrow I will go to you with pistols which I have loaded myself."

Day was beginning to break. I went down into the street, I took a messenger up with me and had him carry away all my effects, and I said good-by to my household; I was going to live as a bachelor again. I had my parcels carried to my little apartment. Ah, how glad I was I had kept it, it seemed as though I had divined that one day

I should go back to live in it. Madame Dupont looked at the packages which they were bringing in for me.

"Is monsieur going to sleep at home again?" she said with a mischievous look.

"Yes, Madame Dupont, hereafter I am going to live as I did formerly."

This business settled, I took my weapons and went to Raymond's.

"Where are you going, monsieur?" said the portress as she saw me go hurriedly up the stairs.

"To M. Raymond's."

"Why, monsieur, don't you know that he has left?"

"What! left? — gone away?"

"Of course! He didn't go to bed and he himself carried several packages away during the night. He paid me his rent for the term, and ordered me to sell his furniture, saying that he would send later on for the proceeds. I don't know what could have happened to him, but he looked so much troubled that at first I thought he had gone mad. He was in such a hurry that he did not give himself time to take the most necessary things. Finally, he went off without telling me where he was going to."

"The coward! it will be a bad day for him if I ever meet him; it will be just like him to have left Paris."

I left M. Raymond's portress dumfounded and

returned to the Rue Saint-Florentin to arrange everything in my little apartment that I might resume my old habits.

After some days I became calmer and even cheerful. Yes, the cheerfulness which I had lost seemed to return to me as soon as I was settled in my little lodging. Sometimes I imagined myself still a bachelor; in fact the best thing that I could do, now that I had no longer a wife, was to forget that I was married.

As I had foreseen only too well, it was me at whom they were throwing stones. I received a letter from my sister in which she said that it was frightful for me to have left my wife and that we must really be reconciled, that Madame de Pontchartrain was furious, and that Pélagie was incessantly asking her for money. As my only answer I wrote to my sister the exact details of the event which had caused our separation and begged her to keep it secret; of course she would do nothing of the kind, but it was all the same to me if the people at Melun did know that my wife had betrayed me, for I had no desire to return to that town.

I had resumed my former way of life in my little apartment in the Rue Saint-Florentin, except that I committed none of my former follies. In fact, I was obliged to be steady and economical, for my dear wife was spending her fortune very rapidly and I foresaw that by and by she would

have recourse to me, and it would be necessary for me to settle an income upon her.

I congratulated myself on the quietude which I enjoyed in my house. I felt the relief of not having Raymond for a neighbor, though I was extremely desirous to discover his whereabouts; but in vain did I search throughout Paris, he must have left the city.

I wondered, by the way, whom I now had for my neighbor on the same floor, I had never seen anyone go in or go out; it must be that the person was very sedentary in his habits. I am not curious, but one likes to know who is living near them. Madame Dupont would tell me that.

My portress still did my household work, she came as usual and was delighted when I was willing to have a little conversation.

"Madame Dupont, it seems to me that you told me that the apartment which M. Raymond formerly occupied was let."

"Certainly it is, monsieur. It was only to let for a week, someone came in and settled right away."

"How is it that I never see a soul go out or come in? nor do I ever hear the slightest noise."

"Oh, it's a very quiet sort of a person, who never goes out and never receives a visitor; she gives no trouble, but it cannot be amusing for her."

"Oh, it's a lady, is it?"

"Yes, monsieur. And as to the propriety of her conduct why, there is nothing at all to say against her."

"Is she an elderly woman?"

"Not at all, monsieur, she is a young — a very young woman."

"And is she pretty?"

"Yes, very pretty, so far as I have been able to see, on account of the large bonnet[1] she always wears."

"What! does such a young and pretty woman live alone — no lovers, no husband?"

"Nobody I tell you. Oh, if anyone came I should know it well."

"She goes out sometimes, doesn't she?"

"In the morning, very early, to buy what she needs, before you are awake, and that's why you haven't met her; after that, she doesn't stir out of her rooms."

"That's very singular."

"I have sometimes wanted to talk with her, but she won't speak; it's impossible to get two words from her. However, as she behaves herself properly and pays promptly, there is nothing to be said. It seems to me, though, that they ought to oblige people to make their identity known."

I could not refrain from smiling at my portress' observation, what she had told me about my neighbor had awakened my curiosity; at first I thought

[1] This was the era of the coalscuttle bonnet.

I would try to get acquainted with her, but on later reflection I said to myself, "Why should I vex this young woman? She does not care for society, perhaps she has her reasons for flying from it; let us respect her solitude."

I no longer went into society; that would have been to expose myself to meeting my wife and to a thousand troublesome questions as to the motive of our separation. People in society are so indiscreet that they always ask you by preference what it would be disagreeable for you to relate, and I did not wish to afford them this pleasure. I went to the theatre, always occupying an inferior place; sometimes I saw my wife in a box with two or three young men, or in a carriage. It seemed to me that she did not greatly regret Raymond; however, that did not surprise me, she was not the kind of woman to regret anybody.

When I saw her at a distance I quickly made off, and she did the same for her part; that was the only thing in which we agreed perfectly.

For three months now I had lived a bachelor life; this time had passed very quickly, I had never felt bored or lonely, I resumed my books, my music—music is sweet to the heart, so well does it blend our sorrows and our joys. Every evening I sat down to my piano and passed several hours there; it seemed to me that Nicette was near me, that she was listening to me, I dreamed in my waking thoughts that she loved me still, that she

had never loved anyone but me, and I became happier then in lulling myself with those chimeras. Men are only grown-up children who sing lullabies to themselves all their lives.

Sometimes I forgot the time, the silence of night disposes the mind to illusions, and I gave way to those which delighted me. Besides, nobody had complained in the house that I played so late; there was no one above me except some maids, and such a trifle as that would not prevent them from sleeping; below me was only an old lady of independent means who was rather deaf. There was, then, only my neighbor on the same floor whom it could inconvenience, but I asked the portress if she had said anything to her about it, and she told me she had said nothing; that woman was really invisible. Several times, however, it had seemed to me that I heard her opening her door, then I went out on to the landing very quickly, for I confess that I wanted to see her, but her door was already closed.

If this lady had passed two or three times before me I should not have noticed her, but nothing so greatly tickles the curiosity as that which has an air of secrecy. I must get up one morning very early and try to see her; I said that in the evening, but I overslept myself and I forgot it. I am not the man to play sentinel on my landing nor to look for a quarter of an hour through a keyhole; I must leave such means as that to Raymond.

I had received no more news from Melun; for some time past I had no longer met my wife, who finally left me in peace. I learned occasionally through those officious friends whom I met sometimes, though I tried in vain to avoid them, that Madame Dorsan was continuing the same mode of life; that she was still over-fond of balls and all kinds of pleasure, that she became more coquettish every day, and a thousand more items of news which were quite as agreeable. Some of them even advised me to act rigorously and to solicit an order to have her shut up. I thanked them and turned my back on them, and I will wager that the same persons said to Pélagie that I was a tyrant, a bear, a man unworthy to be the husband of so pretty and interesting a woman, and that she should have me declared legally incapable of managing my own affairs.

In order to avoid meeting my wife I often went for a walk into the country, not in the direction in which society was apt to go, but in that where the good bourgeois and the little grisettes were wont to take their pleasure. Oh, these little grisettes! whom I was formerly so fond of running after; but now I am settled, marriage has considerably aged my head.

Upon this day I was feeling happier than I had done of late. I went out on horseback and prolonged my ride to a greater extent than usual. Night surprised me at Vincennes; I put my horse

to a gallop and arrived in Paris just in time to avoid a storm which recalled to me the one at Montmorency.

After leaving my horse at the stable I went back home. I felt fatigued and had need of rest; I could hardly get upstairs. I was about to open my door when I felt something under my hand; what could it be? I dared hardly believe it, but I held in my hand a bouquet. I drew my breath and inhaled its odor; yes, it was a bouquet which I had found there, in the same place where she had formerly put them. Ah, and she must have brought me this one also, who else would have made me such a present? So I hurried in, for I was anxious to look at it.

When I got into my room where I had a light I examined and kissed my beautiful bouquet; it was of orange flowers, precisely similar to those she had brought me before. Oh, it must indeed have been she who sent me this, but then she must be in Paris, and she still thinks sometimes of me, she still loves me.

All these ideas passed through my head. I looked through the bouquet to see if there was not a word of writing, but there was nothing. I went back to the door, looked on the ground and in the keyhole, but could find nothing; I had only the bouquet, but that was a good deal. She must have been here; I determined to go and question Madame Dupont.

I went rapidly down the stairs, I no longer thought of my fatigue, and went straight to the portress.

"Has anyone been here for me?"

"No, monsieur."

"What? hasn't anyone asked for me? a young lady?"

"I assure you, monsieur, that I have seen no one for you and that I haven't left my door."

"Oh, you never see anything, any more than you did of old."

"What did you say, monsieur?"

"Some one has been, however, for I found this bouquet in my keyhole."

"Why, that's very strange, it must be that someone has been mistaken in the door."

"Mistaken? No, nobody has been mistaken, it was she who came."

"She, what do you mean by she?"

"Open the door for me, Madame Dupont!"

"What, monsieur, are you going out now; why don't you wait till the storm is over? It is pouring with rain."

"Open the door for me, I tell you."

The portress dared make no further observations. I went out. I did not know where I was going, but I felt that I positively must have some news of Nicette, I wanted to know where she was. I ran along the street, looking all around me, but I could see nobody, it was raining fearfully. I

went to the Rue Saint-Honoré, her old shop; it seemed to me that in going to the neighborhood where she had lived I might learn something, but the shop was closed, closed fast; I knocked, but nobody answered. I went into the café opposite. I asked the waiters if the flower-woman had retaken her old shop; they looked at me as if they did not know what I was talking about. I was very much agitated, the water which was dripping from my clothing and the mud which covered my boots gave me such a disordered appearance that they no doubt took me for an insane person. I left the café without having obtained any information. Where should I go now? I must find her, she might be living in the neighborhood where her mother had lived; it was a fearful distance, but I ran all the way there without stopping. It was quite late; the only place open was a grocer's shop near the house which Madame Jerome had occupied. I went in and asked some questions. There at least they were politer than they had been in the café, because they had been more accustomed to seeing people wet and muddy, but I learned nothing further. Since Madame Jerome's death nobody had seen her daughters in the neighborhood.

I must therefore renounce all hope of discovering what had become of her, but there was still a hope left me, she had sent me a bouquet, perhaps she would come back to me herself.

I returned sadly home, I felt overwhelmed. My clothes were glued to my body, I felt that I could not walk, but I looked in vain for a carriage; it was raining in torrents and I did not meet one. I arrived home at length, Madame Dupont was sitting up for me; the poor woman was frightened at the state I was in, she wanted to go up and warm my bed and make me take something, but I refused her attention, hoping that rest would make me all right again. I went up to my apartments, my teeth were chattering violently, my legs trembled under me. I did not feel well, I got into bed and put Nicette's bouquet on my heart; it seemed to me that that ought to cure me.

The next day my portress found me a prey to the most violent delirium. I recognized nobody, my head was on fire, my palate was parched, a raging fever consumed me; the fatigue, the storm, the agitation I had experienced the evening before, together had united to make me violently ill. In a few days I was at the brink of the grave. Who would care for me? who would watch over me? My relations were not in Paris; I had a wife, it is true, but so far from approaching my bed she would have fled it, fearing contagion; so strangers must take the place of relations and friends.

For nine days I did not know who was watching beside me, I was unconscious of what was going on about me; it was only at the end of that time that the crisis came. It was fortunate; my

delirium ceased, I was saved, nothing was necessary to me but care, quiet, and rest.

I half opened my eyes, I could hardly look around me. I tried to recall my ideas, I perceived Madame Dupont near me.

"Have I been long delirious?" said I.

"Nine days, monsieur. You have been very ill, near death in fact, but, thanks to heaven, you are saved, and nothing now is necessary but plenty of patience and rest. I was sure you would make yourself ill going out in that storm, you were in a perspiration, and when you came back, why, your eyes were starting out of your head; but young men will never listen to anybody, and to put a bouquet under your nose to go to sleep, that's very bad, very malarial."

"What has become of that bouquet?"

"It's there in the other room, don't bother about it; you will find it there later on."

"And who has nursed me during my illness?"

"Why, I did, and then the neighbor helped me."

"The neighbor?"

"Yes, that lady who lives on the same floor with you, she has taken every imaginable care of you. As soon as she knew you were ill she wanted to nurse you, and, my word, if she had been nursing sick people all her life she couldn't have done better."

"Where is she now? I want to thank her."

"Oh, you can thank her later on, she has gone into her own rooms; but see how you are talking, and the doctor has forbidden us to let you speak. Go to sleep, monsieur, go to sleep; that will do you good."

Madame Dupont drew my curtain and would not answer me again. I could not understand the conduct of the lady but I had not the strength as yet to think, and I went to sleep again wishing to see her. Towards evening I woke up, I felt that some one was near me. On hearing the movement which I made this person was about to turn hastily away; but it was too late, my eyes had met hers, I saw her, I recognized her, it was Nicette.

I uttered an exclamation and she returned to my side.

"Ah, please," said I, "speak to me that I may be sure, quite sure that it is you."

"Yes, yes, it is really me, it is your Nicette. Oh, M. Dorsan, I beg of you don't talk any more, it is strictly forbidden. I did not want to show myself to you because of that."

"Dear Nicette, isn't the sight of you more helpful than all their remedies? It is you, it is really you."

I took her hands and I pressed them. I held them to my heart. I had no strength to speak further. She tried to calm me, but she was as much moved as I. Her tears were rolling down

her face; they fell upon me, but they were sweet to both of us.

"And it was you, Nicette, who nursed me during my illness?"

"Was it not my duty, could I have left you to the care of others?"

"You were my mysterious neighbor, then?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"It was very cruel and hard-hearted of you to hide from me."

"I had no idea that the sight of me would afford you any pleasure."

"You thought that?"

"You are married."

"You see very well that I don't live with my wife."

"I dared not appear before you. I feared that it would make you leave your lodging."

"What an idea. Oh, Nicette!"

"However, I could not resist the desire of recalling myself to your thoughts, and that was why you found that bouquet."

"Yes, and I owe it to that that I have found you; Nicette, I beg of you do not leave me again."

"Oh, no, monsieur, I will never leave you again, since you permit me to stay; but I implore you compose yourself and do not talk any more, try to rest a little."

I yielded to her solicitations; in fact I had need of recuperation. Nicette was beside me and it was

to her care that I owed my life; I could hardly believe my happiness. Ah, how well I felt now; sometimes, however, regret mingled with my joy when I thought that Raymond — but then if it had not been so I should have been too happy. Every day I advanced towards health, but in order that I should do well it was necessary that Nicette should be beside me, also that she should never leave me again. She seemed astonished at the feeling which I evinced for her and I read in her eyes the delight which it caused her. She loved me still then! Often, I am glad to say, I gave myself up to all the tenderness with which she inspired me, I rekindled the flame of my love for her, I rested my head on her breast, I inhaled her sweet breath; but when Raymond's image was presented to my thought, all my happiness vanished, my heart swelled and I drew back from Nicette. She noticed the sudden passages from happiness to grief; these changes which acted so quickly in my manners towards her.

"Are you thinking of your wife," she said to me one day, when I had drawn back from her with a sigh.

"No," said I looking at her gloomily, "I was thinking of Raymond."

"Of M. Raymond, and does that make you sigh?"

"Should that astonish you?—has he not robbed me of the greatest riches?"

"What do you mean by that? I don't understand you."

"Ah, Nicette, you have loved him, and you would not listen to me."

"Me — I've loved him? Good God, what makes you say that?"

"I saw him. I know that he has been your lover."

"My lover, good heavens, I must be truly despicable in your eyes. And you thought that?"

Tears suffocated her, she could not say any more. I ran towards her, I pressed her in my arms and covered her with kisses. The bare idea that Raymond had deceived me had made me happy already.

"Nicette, dear Nicette, answer me? What was he doing with you? I saw him, he was holding your hands, you yourself have confessed it."

"Ah, how could you believe that I would love anybody else but you? I who would give my life for you, I who since I have seen you have thought only of you. Ah, forgive me for loving you so much; it will offend you, perhaps, but you must now know all that is in the depths of my heart.

"When I lived in my shop my only happiness was in seeing you; every day I expected you or I hoped that I should see you pass, but that happened very rarely. I brought you bouquets as an evidence of my gratitude, and I seized the moment when the portress was not there to fasten it to

your door. Sometimes I saw you go by with a lady on your arm, then I would weep, for I said to myself I shall never walk like that with him. When I was long without seeing you I wanted to have news of you, but dared not go to your house to get it.

"Then, one day, M. Raymond came to buy some flowers, he looked very hard at me, no doubt he recognized me; he came back the next day. While looking at my flowers he paid me some compliments, but I did not listen to them; he spoke to me of you and then it gave me great pleasure to listen; he perceived that, for every time he came back he spoke of you, and I always invited him to stay. He was the only one through whom I could get any news of you, and though what he said made me very sad still I listened to him. He told me that you had twenty mistresses, that you loved all women, and that you had had a good laugh at me, and he showed me the bouquets which I had brought you, of which he said you had made him a present."

"The wretch, and you believed it, Nicette."

"Alas, when I saw you come into my shop looking for flowers with that lady who called you her dearest, and who looked at me so mockingly, I really thought that he had told me the truth, and that gave me so much sorrow that I could not stay in the house. I walked about alone for a great part of the night, not knowing what I was doing. It was during that time that you came back; the next

morning when I saw you again you looked very angry, and you know well you left me very abruptly; I wanted to detain you but I dared not.

"In the evening M. Raymond returned, and he spoke to me of you, I wept and he wished to console me; he might have taken my hand in his, but I did not feel it, I was thinking only of you. He came back again the next day, then he wanted to talk to me about himself, he told me that he adored me and a thousand other things; but as he no longer spoke of you I did not care to listen to him. I would not receive him again. He wrote me a long love-letter calling me hard-hearted and wicked, I kept it to show it to you, and at last he left me in peace.

"As I did not see you again, I came to this house and learned that you had gone away, but that you had reserved your apartment, and that made me hope that you would return. But one day M. Raymond passed my shop and, delighted to be able to cause me grief, he told me that you were married. Alas, that is only what I should have expected. I knew very well that others must love you. However, I became so sad that I had not the courage to keep my shop; besides, I had become rich enough to give it up. I came into this house; I had learned that the apartment on your floor was vacant, and I lost no time in taking it. It brought me near that chamber where I had passed a night which had decided the rest of my

life; in fact, when you came back here to live I did not dare let you see me because I did not think that the sight of me would give you any pleasure. That is the truth; do you think now that I have loved anybody but you?"

When she had finished her story Nicette ran to get Raymond's letter and bring it to me; I did not need it to believe what she told me, but this last proof confirmed the fact that I had been deceived by appearances and Raymond's lies.

How sweet was this moment which gave Nicette back to me worthy of all my love. I hastened to relate to her all that had happened to me and all that I had experienced in believing that she had formed a connection with Raymond. As she listened to me she wept with joy and love, she looked at me, took my hands, and placed them on her heart.

"You love me," she said to me, "and you will love me always. Oh, how happy I am."

The story of my marriage and of Pélagie's conduct astonished her greatly, she could not understand how it was that my wife did not love me; dear Nicette, but for that wretched Raymond I should still be free; but the bonds which linked me to Pélagie are broken by nature if they are not by law.

"What!" said she to me, "shall you not return to your wife?"

"Never. This resolution was irrevocable before I had found you again; she cannot reproach you for anything."

"And do you really want me to stay with you?"

"Do I really want you? how can I now exist without you?"

"Ah, monsieur, how happy I'm going to be."

"Dear Nicette, let there be no more monsieur between us, no more ceremony, I am your friend, your lover. You are the whole world to me. Call me Eugene, your dear Eugene."

The evening had rolled by in this sweet conversation.

"I must go back home," said Nicette, "it is time to go to rest and you have need of it."

"Happiness has restored my health, but you are my nurse and you ought not to leave me."

She blushed, she looked at me, but she had not the strength to refuse me.

"Dear Eugene," she said to me, "I belong to you."

I had not yet tasted the pure intoxication of a true love; not until today did I believe that it existed.

New days dawned for me; beside Nicette time flew and love alone remained. It seemed to me that each day I loved her more. The poor darling sometimes feared that her happiness was but a dream. How keen were our pleasures, how sweet our conversations. Nicette was no longer the little flower-girl whom I had met in former times; since she had known me she had unceasingly tried to divest herself of manners and lan-

guage which might displease me; and she had sought to acquire indispensable knowledge in which she was lacking. During the whole time of her solitary existence near me she had devoted to study every moment she could spare from her remembrance of me. Now she expressed herself easily, in good language; her manners were gracious, her bearing simple and modest; she did not hold herself so straight, nor keep her eyes lowered, nor assume so severe an expression as had Pélagie (before she became my wife); but her manner was modest, her look gentle, everything about her was calculated to please — and her heart! ah, her heart was a treasure!

Six months had passed like a day since I had re-found Nicette; our happiness would have been complete had she not at times had moments of melancholy; I divined what had given birth to them.

"You are married," she said to me often, "it is very wrong for me to live with you. If you should one day despise me."

"Dear Nicette, drive these ideas away, they are repulsive to me. Let people say and think what they please, they are wrong if they blame you. Who is really most worthy to be despised, the wife who betrays her husband? or the woman who is faithful to her lover?"

But one morning as we sat at breakfast somebody rang my bell violently; Nicette answered

the door and ushered into the room a woman, whom I recognized as Pélagie's maid, Justine.

My blood froze. What had she come to tell me?

"Monsieur," said Justine to me, "my mistress, your wife, is very ill; on returning home from a ball three days ago she had a hemorrhage of the lungs. They don't expect her to live, and she wishes to see you."

Nicette turned pale, I saw her totter, but she ran to get my hat for me.

"Go, my dear," she said, "go quickly! your wife is expecting you, and if necessary stay with her, don't come back again. Do what you can to save her life."

I hastened to follow Justine; and went back to the house I had thought never to enter again. What a change was there! what disorder reigned everywhere! I reached my wife's room at last and drew near her bed; I could hardly recognize her. Could that be the Pélagie I had last seen so fresh-looking, so pretty. I forgot the wrong she had done me and felt only pity for her.

She extended her hand to me and I clasped it tenderly in mine.

"I wanted to see you before I died," she said to me in a faint voice, "Eugene, forgive the wrong I have done you; you see I am punished for it. Had I listened to you I should not now be on the brink of the grave."

I wished to console her and I tried to reanimate hope in her heart, but my efforts were unavailing; she was too well aware that the springs of her life were snapped.

I settled myself beside her. The day passed without any change in her condition, but the night was terrible, and at five o'clock in the morning Pélagie had ceased to exist.

I shed tears over the ashes of this woman whose life was so short and whose happiness was so false.

When I had settled the business which devolved upon me because of this event, and paid the debts contracted by my wife, I returned to Nicette.

"Well," she said to me, "how is your wife?"

"She is no more."

"Oh, my dear, how deplorable was her fate; and she might have been so happy in loving you."

Thinking that after the shock I had sustained a change would be beneficial to me, I determined to travel with Nicette; it would put the finishing touch to her education. The sight of Switzerland and Italy are always beneficial to one who knows how to think and to store his memory with delightful reminiscences.

Nicette was quite ready to accompany me, declaring that she should always be happy with me, no matter under what skies or in what climate we should live. I was for her, happiness, the world, and all that was pleasurable in it. "Oh, Nicette!" I thought, "love me always thus, for should you

ever betray me I shall place no faith in love or in anything else."

We started in a berlin which I had purchased, that we might be free to stop when it pleased us to admire the works of man or of nature. This is the most agreeable manner of travelling and the only way that is satisfactory, in my opinion.

We were passing through Switzerland and, as I wished to show Nicette the celebrated Mont Cenis, we had stopped at an inn at the foot of that mountain; I noticed when we alighted that there seemed to be a good deal of confusion in the house. I asked for a room, and the young servant who conducted us to it kept uttering exclamations.

"What has happened here?" said I. "You seem very busy; I suppose you have a great many guests."

"Yes, monsieur, a great number of foreigners came this morning for the purpose of climbing the mountain, some of them were English, some Russians, some French, all full of curiosity; but that isn't what is putting us out. Need I tell you that this morning all these gentlemen were assembled together before breakfast and they began to talk about tables d'hote. One of them said people were always amused when he sat at one because he ate very quickly; another asserted that he could excel anybody at that, and that he would swallow six hard-boiled eggs before breakfast and still eat much faster than anybody else; everybody made

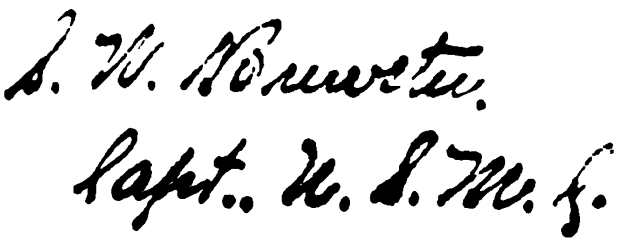
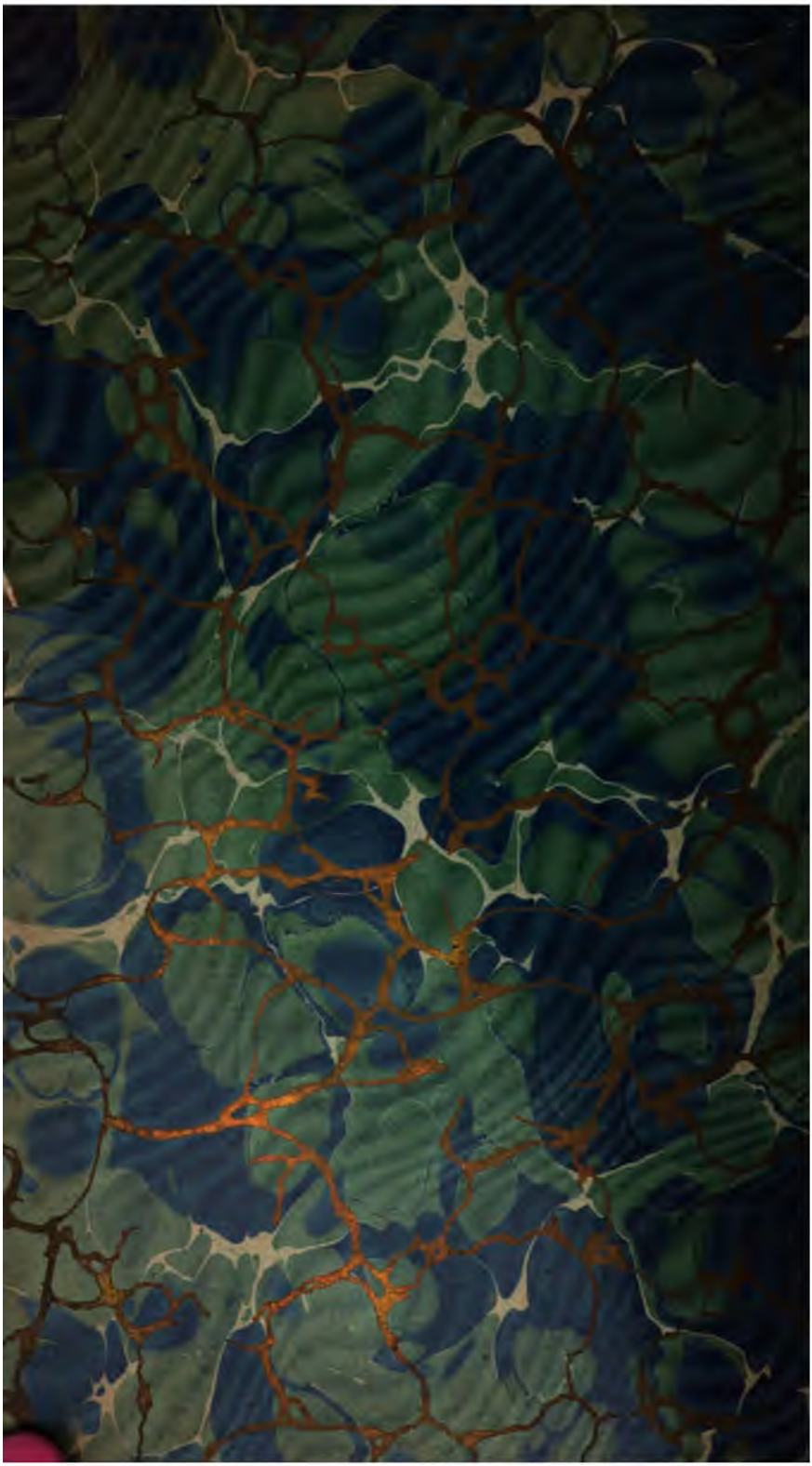
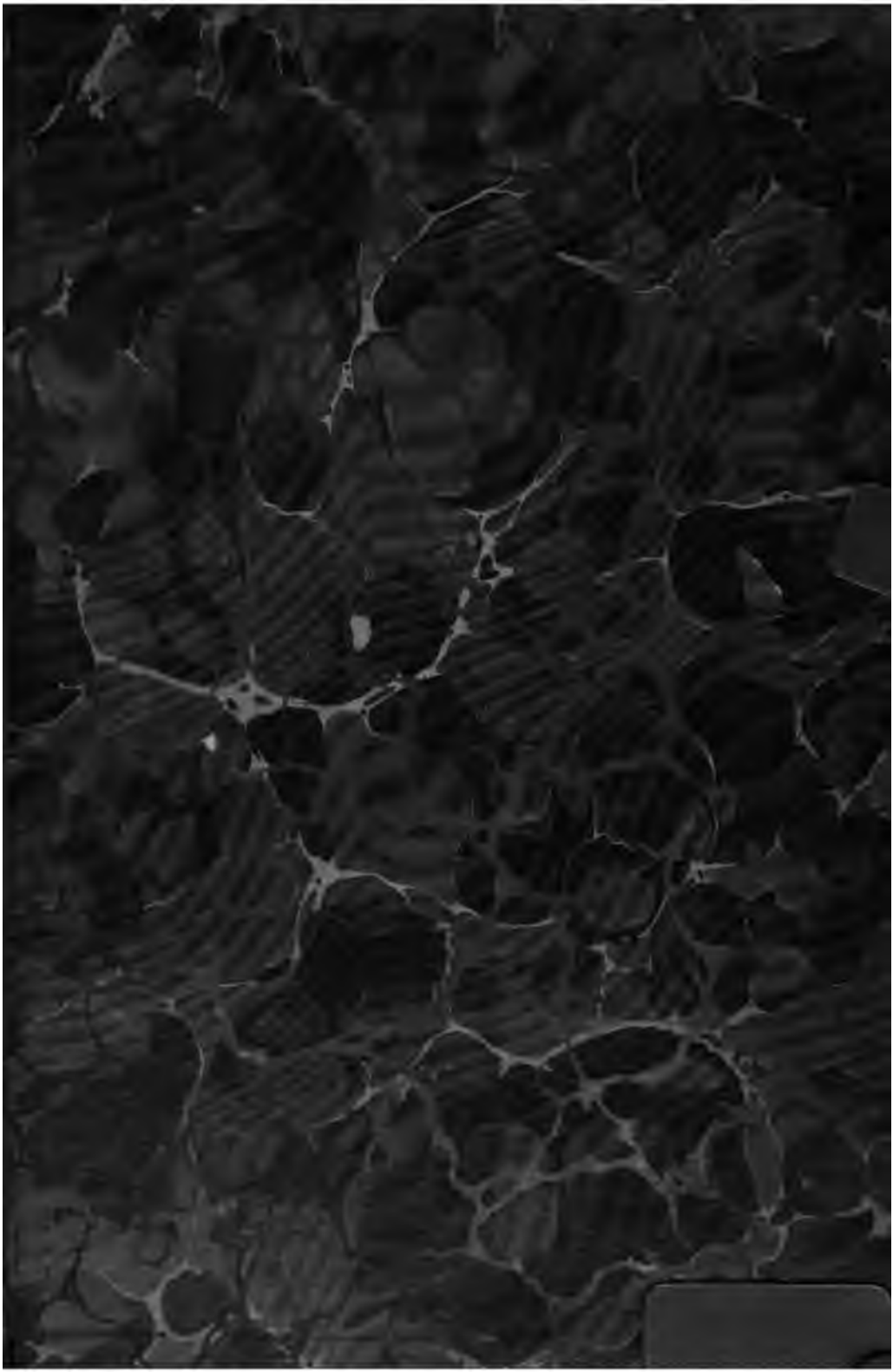
fun of him, but he bet ten louis on it and an Englishman took up the bet. The poor dear man had the hard-boiled eggs brought; he swallowed them and then sat down to breakfast, and there he ate at a great rate, so fast that he won the ten louis. But immediately after he turned yellow, red, blue, all manner of colors; they had to carry him to his bed, and instead of climbing the mountain he's likely to kick the bucket right here."

"It was an Englishman, of course, who acted in this pleasing fashion."

"No, monsieur, it was a Frenchman."

"A Frenchman!"

"If you would like to see him, everybody is at his bedside, each one suggesting a remedy that may save him."

I was curious to see this extraordinary mortal, so I left Nicette and made them show me to the dying man's room. Just as I entered he expired, a victim to the results of his wager; I glanced at him and I recognized,—

My Neighbor Raymond.